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Alfreda.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

FOR some time past nothing had been heard of Alex Cameron or the men under his command.

Tidings had reached the company's offices in Cowl Court of the party of explorers having reached the Cape in safety, also that they had started for the interior fully equipped and in high spirits.

Later accounts from time to time informed the company's secretary of their successful progress across the desert, and later on still that they had reached the Zouga, with some loss of cattle and property, but in fairly good health.

That was some four months ago, and since then no direct communication had been received from any member of the exploring party.

People at length began to feel uneasy concerning their fate, and much anxiety was felt by Alex Cameron's friends when letters from him ceased to arrive by the Cape mails.

Merryman, his old clerk, had been in a state of chronic misery since his employer's letters ceased to arrive ; he was desponding before, he was now in absolute despair.

On going one morning to his solitary office, he stopped at the newsvender's, as usual, to purchase his morning paper.

Merryman delighted, above all things, in the morning papers. The newspapers contained the only literature he ever read, and he generally began his paper at the first page and read through to the last.

Once quietly seated at his desk he would unfold his cherished newspaper and for awhile forget his misery and his loneliness.

Reading on slowly and methodically on this particular morning, he at length came to a paragraph that froze the life-blood in his veins.

This paragraph stated that intelligence had reached Cape Town, that nearly every member of the exploring expedition had been stricken down with fever, when within a few days' journey of Lake Ngami.

Mr. Cameron, it was further stated, was almost the first to succumb to the disease ; he had borne up bravely under repeated attacks of illness, brought on for the most part on account of the drought and scarcity of water, but the unhealthiness of the climate had proved too much for his strong endurance at last, and it was possible, from the privations they were called on to endure, that not one of the little party would ever recross the desert alive.

So stunned was the poor old clerk at finding his worst fears confirmed, that he dropped forward with a deep groan, and would have fallen on the floor had not the high desk supported his head and shoulders.

How long he remained in a state of insensibility he could not even guess ; he felt ill and dazed for some time after he recovered partial consciousness, and was only aroused from his state of stupor at last by oft-repeated knocking at the door.

He could not remember where he was for some moments ; he heard the knocking like one just awakened out of a heavy slumber ; at length, more from habit than set purpose, he got down from his office stool and proceeded to open the door.

There was seldom light enough on the landing outside for any one to see a person distinctly from the door of Mr. Merryman's office.

All that the old clerk was able to distinguish in the semi-obscurity, when he first opened the door, was a tall slender figure attired in a long black mantle.

In a moment it flashed on his mind that this was another tall dark woman who had come to inquire concerning his late advertisements in the *Times*.

Despairing, at length, of finding Alice Mathers and her child, he had caused some half-dozen advertisements to be inserted in the *Times*, stating that if A. M. would call at a certain address in the Temple, she would hear of something to her advantage.

To judge by the number of women that answered this advertisement in person, they who owned A. M. as their initial letters must have been legion.

For the first week, the stairs and pavement leading to Alex Cameron's chambers were blocked by females of all ages from

seventeen to seventy, and poor Merryman had rather a trying time of it, until he caused a notice to be posted at the entrance that no more A. M.'s need apply.

This tall person was certainly another A. M., although the notice had been posted at the door three weeks since, and remained there yet.

The old man's heart beat quickly ; this woman was tall—could it be Alice, at last ?

"Can I see Mr. Merryman ?" asked a low, sweet voice from under the thick veil.

The clerk started ; surely he had heard that voice before ; he was too astonished to answer a word.

The lady repeated the question in a louder tone, thinking from his manner he was hard of hearing.

"Yes, ma'am, my name is Merryman," said he, in a dazed sort of way. He was trying to remember where he had heard that voice before.

"Will you allow me to enter, please ? I have come to make inquiry about Mr. Cameron. I shall not detain you many minutes."

"Ah ! yes, I remember !" ejaculated the old clerk, tears springing to his eyes as he moved aside and invited her to enter. When he had closed the door, he looked about for a chair, but they were all so worn and dusty, he was quite ashamed to offer her one.

Alex Cameron's private rooms had seldom been opened since Lady Chineron had paid that secret and memorable visit there some months ago. Yet with native politeness Mr. Merryman begged her to wait a moment whilst he unlocked the door of the inner room and opened the windows.

This was a work of some minutes, but when all was ready, he invited her to enter and placed a chair for her near the open window.

She threw back her thick veil, dropped the dark wrap from her shoulders, and stood before the old clerk fair as a poet's dream.

He had only caught a passing glance at her face, when she paid a visit to Alex Cameron, on the eve of his departure from England, yet her features appeared quite familiar to him.

It seemed as though he had seen a face very like the one before him, looking out of that open window, with the same far-away look in the deep-blue eyes, many a time and oft before to-day.

At length she turned from the window with a long-drawn sigh and inquired when he had last heard from Mr. Cameron.

This brought the old clerk back once more to the sad intelligence he had read that morning in the newspaper.

He had not quite out-lived his days of romance, and at once concluded that Alex Cameron was her lover.

Doubtless she had not seen the morning papers, and had come to him, hoping to hear some recent tidings of the absent one.

He must be wary, lest he gave her a sudden shock. "I have not received a letter from Mr. Cameron for some time; he was fairly well then," he replied hesitatingly.

"Will you kindly tell me the date of that letter?" she asked eagerly. "It is six months since any of his friends have received any direct communication from him, and they are beginning to feel very anxious about him."

"I am not quite certain about the date of his last letter; however, I will fetch it, and you can see for yourself," replied the clerk; and leaving the room he returned in a few minutes with the letter in his hand; then once more left the room, thinking she wished to be alone.

His heart was too full to speak; the sight of his employer's handwriting, after what he had just read in the papers, quite unnerved him.

"I hope she won't ask to see the *Times*," he said half-aloud as he mounted his office-stool, and leaning his head on the desk, wept silently, like one mourning for his only son.

He was only a weak, broken-down old man, with nothing strong or self-reliant in his nature. Alex Cameron of late years had been all to him: patron, employer and friend; his only friend, indeed, for the poor old clerk had outlived the friends of his youth, and if he had any relatives living they had quite forgotten their poor broken-down kinsman.

And now that he was far down in the vale of years, his kind employer was taken from him: he was no longer fit for active work, and had laid up little or no provision for his old age.

And yet he had never been out of employment for long and had received on an average from eighty to one hundred per annum.

Therefore we suppose few could be found who would waste their sympathy on this improvident old clerk.

Still one is bound to add that as he sat there weeping over the fate of his employer, like the poor weak creature that he was, he never gave one thought to his own forlorn friendless condition.



No, no, his sole grief was for the brave, true-hearted man, stricken down in the prime of his youth, far from home and kindred.

So absorbed did he become in this heart-felt sorrow that he quite forgot all about the young lady he had left in the inner office, and in his absent-minded way, took down his hat and prepared to go out.

In turning round he observed that the door was open, then it flashed across his mind that she was still there.

He remained for a moment, undecided what to do; when she appeared at the doorway with the letter in her hand.

"I beg pardon," he stammered, "but I thought——"

"That I was about to remain all day," she interrupted, with a smile that reminded the old clerk of a ray of sunshine penetrating his gloomy office.

"This letter," she went on, still standing where the sunlight fell on her golden hair and tall graceful figure, making her look like the creation of some master painter of the olden time, glowing forth from the dark background into a glorious reality, "this letter bears a later date than the one we last received from Mr. Cameron. Would you mind my taking it with me? It shall be returned next week at the latest."

Merryman valued that letter highly. Most likely it was the last he should ever receive from his friend—but one look into her wistful eyes decided him. He gave her the letter unconditionally; he did not require it again, he said. He thought, and rightly, that ere long she would treasure up that bit of writing as the devotee treasures up some relic of her patron saint.

As she thanked him she observed how worn and sad the old clerk looked, and said kindly that she feared he felt rather lonely, sitting there all day long by himself.

"Oh, that's not it," he replied in a husky voice, his lip trembling with suppressed emotion. "I'm used to the place, and old folks like quiet—but what troubles me is, that the time may soon come when this office will be my resting place no longer; I'm getting old, young lady—Ah, yes, I'm getting old."

Tears rained down his cheek as he spoke. Lady Maud was moved with pity; she told him she was certain that Mr. Cameron would never dream of parting with such a faithful clerk, because he was growing old in his service.

"Oh, that's not it," repeated the old man. "What if he never returns and this office is closed—what then?"

Lady Maud's cheek paled. "Do not speak in that desponding way," she said quickly. "Have you served Mr. Cameron for long?"

"Some years—but that's not it. I'm not thinking of myself but——"

"You are low-spirited; we all suffer from that at times," she said, trying to cheer him. "Well, you are not too old to work; if ever you find yourself in want of a situation come to me and——"

"Pardon me, madam, I'm a gentleman, although I never had any proper pride," interrupted the old clerk, raising his head and pulling himself up straight. "My father was a rector, and my grandfather a dean; I would not disgrace them by taking alms. Still I see you mean kindly, and I thank you."

"You mistake me altogether, Mr. Merryman," she replied gently; "we, that is my mother and I, require a private secretary—I thought the post might suit you. Here is my card; if you ever need a friend, will you please remember to write or come to me."

She shook hands with him heartily, laid her card on the shabby old desk, and was gone ere he well remembered how it all came to pass that he was once more alone.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHEN Lady Maud reached the Strand she walked on some distance without considering that she was alone and unattended; indeed, she was so preoccupied that she scarce knew where she was.

The old clerk's words kept ringing in her ears, "he may never return, he may never return!" Ah, and hers was the hand that had sent him, perhaps, to his doom! This was the burden of her thoughts as she walked unheedingly along the busy thoroughfare.

She was plainly attired, her black tweed wrap reaching nearly to the hem of her robe, yet her graceful carriage and small dainty feet, that scarcely seemed to touch the pavement as she walked, attracted many admiring eyes towards her.

Still she continued her way heedless of it all until stopped by the traffic at the corner of Wellington Street; then she became somewhat nervous, and began to look about her for a cab, but no empty cab was in sight.

After a little hesitation she crossed over, aided by an obliging policeman, and made her way towards Covent Garden.

She had only arrived in town, from Paris, yesterday, therefore she thought a present of fruit would prove very acceptable to her mother, whom she had left at home, rather tired and worn out by her journey.

She knew her way quite well about Covent Garden, and was well known, also, by more than one fruiterer and florist as a liberal patron.

To-day she first halted at Hart's, and purchased a small sheaf of moss roses, together with a few choice bouquets, that left little change out of a five-pound note; then on to a fruiterer's, where she selected some fruit.

Whilst standing just inside the door of the small shop, to be out of the crush of the throng, she observed a tall woman, attired in shabby mourning, looking anxiously over the choice fruit displayed at the open window. She lingered some minutes in an undecided way over a basket of peaches, but the price was apparently beyond her means, and she passed on.

Something in the appearance of this woman appeared familiar to Lady Maud; she was certain she had met her somewhere, but she could not recall when or where.

She was still puzzling over the matter when the woman returned, and after examining the peaches once more, laid down three shillings, remarking, as she did so, that the fruit was very dear, but she must have them for her sick child, at any price. No sooner had the woman's voice fallen on her ear than Lady Maud gave a start of surprise. "Alice Mathers," she exclaimed, making a step towards the window; but the woman did not hear her, she took up the small basket of peaches and hastened away.

Lady Maud hurried out of the shop, hoping to overtake her, but she saw Alice was already some distance ahead. Without waiting to reflect she hastened after her.

She had promised Alex Cameron to befriend Alice Mathers if ever she chanced to meet her, and it certainly behoved her to do so now, as Alice was evidently in straitened circumstances, if not in actual want. Had she not mentioned her sick child? A chill passed over the young girl's frame. Alas! it might be possible that she was bound to help both mother and child, for her dead brother's sake.

Although she walked quickly she found it impossible, without breaking into a run, to overtake Alice; still she did manage to keep her tall thin figure well in sight for the length of three or four streets, when she saw her stop before the door of a shabby-looking tenement and open it with a latch-key, then disappear within, before Lady Maud could reach the house.

For an instant she contemplated ringing the bell and gaining an entrance.

Then all at once she remembered how abruptly she had left the fruiterer's shop, with her recent purchase of flowers lying carelessly on one of the hampers, and thought it best to return immediately.

She could call on Alice early on the morrow, and with that view she noted down the name of the street and number of the house in her pocket-book.

A cab came crawling down the street, on the instant, which she at once engaged.

She was quite out of her reckoning in this poor neighbourhood, and dreaded lest she should lose her way and wander into some of the dreadful haunts of crime which she had heard abounded in that locality.

She desired the cabman to set her down opposite St. Paul's Church and wait there whilst she went into the market to complete her purchases.

This was soon done, as Lady Maud never haggled over prices with tradesmen, and when she returned to the cab she was attended by the fruiterer in person well laden with fruit and flowers.

On her return home she found her mother in the same room, almost in the same attitude she had left her a few hours since. The countess gave a nervous start as her daughter entered quickly, with a servant bearing the fruit and flowers she had purchased close behind her.

The countess had been given to nervous fits and starts ever since her son's untimely death. She was sadly changed, had grown pale and thin, her glorious dark hair was streaked with silver, and her lips were pale and drawn with suffering. She started if the door opened suddenly, with an alarmed expression on her features, like one who is in constant anticipation of evil tidings. She had become averse to society and spent most of her time alone in her own room. Her calm impassive manner had left her; she was irritable and uncertain, seldom in the same mood for two hours together, and although she had lost little of her former haughtiness, she carried herself with less dignity and forbearance than formerly.

She scarcely glanced at the beautiful flowers or the choice fruit which her daughter had selected with so much care, but remarked in a querulous tone that the luncheon bell had rung ten minutes since, and she disliked to be kept waiting.

Lady Maud had thrown off her wrap in the hall ; she now followed the countess to the dining-room without taking off her bonnet, and both mother and daughter sat down to table in silence.

"I haven't the least appetite," said the countess querulously. "Put the grapes on the table, Burnet ; then go to your dinner."

When the butler and footman had left the dining-room, the countess turned to her daughter and asked her where she had been all the morning, in no very amiable tone of voice.

When Lady Maud informed her she had been to the Temple, to inquire if there had been any letters of late from Alex Cameron, a look of annoyance came into her eyes, but she made no remark, other than that a servant might have been sent on the errand ; the Temple was not a place for a young lady to be seen in alone.

Then after a pause she said, "Norland called this morning ; I'm sorry you were out when he came."

"Ah, it matters little ; I shall see him soon enough," answered Lady Maud in a tone of vexation.

"Soon enough !" echoed the countess. "What do you mean ?"

"Oh, nothing ; just what I said."

"Well, I consider that you cannot see Norland too soon ; something should be decided on at once ; the engagement has lasted quite long enough."

"Quite," answered the young lady curtly.

"I am glad to hear you say so ; of course the marriage cannot be delayed much longer."

"Norland does not appear in any hurry ; it would not be good taste on our side to display impatience."

"You are dreadfully irritating, child. Well, no matter ; we shall take care to know what this laggard in love intends to do before we leave town."

Lady Maud gave her fair shoulders a shrug by way of reply and helped herself to a peach.

"Oh, by the way," she exclaimed, suddenly remembering whom she had seen in Covent Garden Market, "I met an old friend this morning quite unexpectedly."

The countess looked a sort of languid who was it ? but remained silent.

"You remember Alice Mathers, do you not ?"

The countess gave a start like one galvanized, and stared at her daughter with eyes distended either with surprise or terror.

Still she never uttered one word, although she opened her lips slightly, and clenched her hands like one about to strike down a foe.

Lady Maud's eyes were fixed on her plate; she did not observe the effect her words produced on her mother, so she went on to relate how she had followed Alice and had failed to overtake her. When she at length raised her eyes, the countess had recovered command over her features; she was paler than usual, that was all.

"I noted down her address carefully," she went on, "because I intend looking her up early to-morrow morning. You have no objection to my doing so, have you, dear mamma?"

"Yes, every objection," replied the countess sternly, "and what is more, I forbid you to hold any communication with that creature; should you meet her again avoid her as you would a viper in your path. Give me her address. As you say she looked in needy circumstances, I don't mind sending her pecuniary aid myself, spite of her base ingratitude; but nothing would displease me more than for a daughter of mine to notice her even by a look."

Lady Maud never dared question her mother's wishes, nor disobey her commands; she drew forth the small memorandum book and, opening it at the address she had jotted down, handed her the book in silence.

In silence also the countess turned down the leaf, cut it out with a small silver fruit knife that lay to hand, and folding up the leaf carefully, returned the memorandum book to her daughter.

Not another word was spoken on either side until the countess rose from table and prepared to leave the room; then she remarked in a careless tone that Norland would dine with them that evening, and Fanny had promised to bring Hardbend and his younger brother to make up a family party of six.

No answer being required, Lady Maud made no reply to this communication, but she could not refrain from giving a little impatient shrug of the shoulders and slightly elevating her eye-brows.

The countess observed this with rising anger.

She fixed her eyes sternly on her daughter and said in her cold deliberate way:

"I forgot to tell you that there is something in this morning's *Times* about Alex Cameron. Perhaps, when you find that little romance of yours is ended, you will begin to act somewhat more reasonably towards Norland. You will find the paper in my morning-room, if you care to look at it."



Cold and cruel even now ; in that she was not the least changed. Yet it was pitiless, even in her, to bid her daughter go and read that the man she loved had died in a far-off land amongst strangers, and that the one romance of her life was ended.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

A FEW days after Lady Maud had seen Alice Mathers in Covent Garden, she might be found sitting, diligently plying her needle, in a dingy second-floor room in Dean Street. The room was clean and orderly, although comfortless and bare. No one came to lodge in Dean Street who required luxuriously-furnished apartments.

Alice had not changed for the better since we last saw her in Alex Cameron's chambers. She was still painfully thin and pale, and her large dark eyes had lost none of their fierceness.

Freda, however, who sat listlessly in a corner with a picture book spread before her, looked faded and fragile, like a flower drooping for lack of air and light.

The thoughts of Alice as she bent over her work were by no means pleasant, if one might judge from the expression of her rigid features and tightly-compressed lips.

Whatever her thoughts may have been, however, they were suddenly interrupted by a loud knock on the door.

She looked up from her work with surprise depicted on every feature, a knock at her door was a very unusual occurrence indeed.

The knock was repeated, this time rather impatiently.

Alice rose up, and going to the door, opened it a little way cautiously.

"Ah, beg pardon, ma'am," said some one in a particularly insinuating voice. "You are the—ahem!—the lady I came to see. May I be allowed to enter?"

"You are quite a stranger to me," replied Alice bluntly, as she held the door in her hand to prevent his coming in. "May I ask the name of the person you want to see?"

"Well, formerly Mathers—Miss Alice Mathers. Pray allow me to enter ; I have something particular to say to you, ahem !—something very particular, I assure you."

Alice surveyed him carefully from head to foot. His appearance was that of a professional man carefully attired in black ; his countenance, if not pleasing, was blandly smiling, and his manner well bred, if a little too insinuating.

"I cannot remember having seen you before," said Alice, still barring his entrance. "Who desired you to call on me?"

"Ah, well, ahem! when your little girl was ill, do you remember a most kind professional gentleman who pulled her through?"

"Do you mean Doctor Sefton?" asked Alice, quite thrown off her guard.

"Ahem! yes; glad you remember kind friends."

Alice opened the door wide without further parley and invited him to enter the room.

She retained a grateful sense of the great physician's kindness; he who was sought after by the highest in the land, had bent over her child's sick bed as though she were in possession of the wealth and station that had been so cruelly withheld from her. And now in the kindness of his heart he had sent a medical man to inquire after Freda.

This was the thought of Alice, as she opened the door wide to allow the stranger to enter.

It never occurred to her to ask how Doctor Sefton had found out their present abode; naturally trustful and unsuspecting of evil intentions, she received this kindness without once suspecting it paved the way to some pitfall.

"Ahem! so this is the little one who was ill? Looks delicate—wants change—yes, wants change of air, ahem!" said the stranger taking a seat.

"Yes, sir, this is the patient Doctor Sefton was so kind to. I can never be grateful enough for the care he took of her during her illness. But why did he send you here to-day?"

"Ahem! this is one of my rounds, and Sefton is too much engaged to go far out of his way—and really, I'm glad I came; this sweet child requires care. Come here, little one." The supposed doctor held out his hand to Freda, who shrank away and eyed him distrustfully, after the manner of children when repelled instinctively by a stranger's countenance.

"Come and speak to the gentleman, Freda," said her mother, drawing her towards him; "she's timid and shy, because she's not used to see strangers."

"Ahem! yes, timid and nervous—wants change—sea air will set her up—must have change, ma'am." He took Freda's hand, felt her pulse, looked at her tongue and shook his head.

Poor Alice watched him anxiously.

"Nothing wrong, I trust? Oh, sir, pray tell me, is there anything serious the matter with my darling child?"

"Well, ahem! she must have change and plenty of nourishment; with care, ma'am, she may pick up again."

He never once looked at Alice whilst he spoke, the child appeared to absorb his entire attention.

"Circumstances will not allow me to go anywhere for a change; but care and nourishment she has never lacked," replied Alice with native dignity.

"Ahem! you don't understand me, ma'am. The sea air would be the thing to give her new life—but, ahem! you give her all she cries for like an indulgent mother. Well, that's not right; she should be dieted: brown bread, new milk, fruits—simple diet, ma'am, simple diet, that's what I mean by nourishment. But why not take her to the seaside?" This time he looked full at Alice, with a most bland expression of countenance.

"For want of means," said Alice simply. "You cannot think we have means to go where we list, when you see us living in such mean lodgings."

"But you have friends, ma'am, friends who would—ahem!—beg pardon——"

He broke off abruptly when he saw the colour rise in the pale cheeks of Alice and her eyes flash.

"But, ahem!" he resumed, rising to go, "of course I only advise what is best for the child—in fact the only remedy that will save her life—drugs are of no use—fresh air, ma'am, fresh bracing air alone will restore her to health."

The colour died out of Alice Mathers' face, the angry light in her eyes became quenched in tears. "Oh!" she exclaimed, thrown off her guard in her alarm for her child's life. "Oh, to think that the child of an earl should perish in a stifling London lodging when a breath from the ocean would give her new life!"

"Ah, that's it," said the stranger quickly. "Why should she want for anything?"

"Why?" echoed Alice passionately. "Why, because we are kept out of our own! That child is an heiress and a lady by right, and her mother is——"

"A countess," finished the stranger, again sitting down and beaming most benevolently on the excited woman.

"You say truly," replied Alice with a glow of pride. "I am the

widow of an earl, although my surroundings do not even bespeak me the gentlewoman."

"Ahem! yes, you have been wronged, madam; fearfully wronged. But we must get this young lady away for a change! When she is restored to health, your friends must rally around you and see what they can accomplish."

"Alas, I have no friends!" said Alice bitterly. "Had I even one true friend, I should not be the occupant of this mean lodging, working from early dawn until far into the night, for the barest pittance."

"Excuse me, madam, if I ask why you do not seek the aid of the law. I know an able lawyer who would soon get you placed in your rightful position, if you can only produce the proofs of your marriage." His manner was so sympathetic, and he appeared to take such a deep interest in restoring Freda to health, that Alice soon found herself confiding in this stranger as though he were the friend of years.

He remained about half-an-hour, and during that time Alice had thrown aside her reserve, and answered his leading questions as though she were telling him her history of her own free will.

When he rose to take leave he said in a friendly way:

"Well, my dear madam, our first care must be to see your daughter restored to health. A friend of mine makes the treatment of children's ailments a specialty; you must allow me to bring him with me on my next visit, as I should like to consult with him on our patient's case."

"Would Doctor Sefton come, do you think? He understands Freda's constitution; she is a shy, nervous child with strangers," replied Alice, quite under the impression that this man was the friend of Doctor Sefton, and had come to see Freda at his request.

"Well, ahem—you see, madam, chest complaints and all that sort of thing is not Doctor Sefton's specialty. We must have the best advice obtainable for this young lady." He laid his plump hand on the head of Freda in a caressing way as he spoke, but the child drew back and shivered as though struck with a sudden chill.

Alice then noticed how white his hands were, though large and clumsy, the joints dimpled like a child's and the fingers fat and stumpy; yet it was a damp flabby hand, as she felt when he shook hands with her at parting.

It was not until after he had left the room and she had time to reflect that she remembered he had not given her his name.

Was it forgetfulness, or design? she questioned, not quite satisfied with the bland, fair-spoken doctor, now that the glamour of his presence was no longer felt.

Yet how sympathetic and friendly he had seemed. So respectful and deferential, too; it was like balm to her wounded spirit to be treated with consideration and polite attention after so many years of contumely and neglect. Still, spite of all, something in his manner had left an impression on her mind that was not altogether agreeable.

A sort of doubt in his good faith and sincerity underlay all she could urge in his favour.

His motive could only be a benevolent one, she said over and over again to herself as she combated with her doubts concerning his good faith; Doctor Sefton knew she was far too poor to pay large fees, and the stranger could see that for himself, by looking at her mean surroundings.

Still she blamed herself for being so communicative about her affairs, for after all he was but a stranger; he had, however, promised to call again soon to hold a consultation over Freda's case, and when he came she determined to know his name before holding any further communication with him.

She had not long to wait, for next day, quite early in the afternoon, a knock came to her door, and as she had been rather expecting to hear that knock since noon, she opened it immediately.

"How-do, madam?" said the visitor of yesterday, shaking hands in a most effusive manner, before he had well bustled into the room. "Told you yesterday we must hold a consultation, and here we are."

The bland doctor was accompanied by two gentlemen attired in black, with a faultless display of linen of snowy whiteness. They bowed respectfully to Alice, and then looked about them for a seat. There were three or four chairs in the room, but all of them appeared rather too rickety to support such portly gentlemen.

"Pray be seated, madam," said one of them, politely placing the strongest-looking chair for her use.

Alice, taken thus by surprise, became embarrassed and quite lost her presence of mind. She sat down mechanically with Freda clinging to the skirt of her gown.

The three gentlemen drew a chair each, until they formed a sort of half-circle, then sat down facing her.

Alice had led such a secluded life for years that the novelty of the situation confused and bewildered her. She was too overpowered by the suddenness of their unexpected presence, even to think, and at first answered their questions at random.

At length it struck her as odd that their questions bore no reference whatever as to the state of Freda's health. Her sense of good-breeding came to her aid also.

Neither of these men had thought fit to give his name.

Why had not her visitor of yesterday introduced his colleagues in proper form, if they had really come for a consultation on her child's case?

She drew herself up with native dignity, and reminded the trio that as yet she was quite unaware to whom she had the honour of speaking.

"Ah—ahem—but, my dear madam, you remember me, surely? You cannot have forgotten Dr. Pounceford. I called yesterday." This was said with an air of surprise and a slight elevation of the eyebrows.

Doctor Pounceford's two friends then began to look at Alice so searchingly that she was quite at a loss for an answer, and felt more confused than before.

Their visit did not last long. In less than ten minutes they rose up to go.

"I think we are agreed," said Doctor Pounceford sententially.

His friends nodded assent, bowed slightly to Alice, and turned to leave the room.

"But what is your opinion about my child's case?" asked Alice, addressing herself to Doctor Pounceford.

"Ahem! my dear madam, we must consult together in private before we can give an opinion on the case. I will call again to-morrow." He shook hands hastily whilst he was yet speaking, and before Alice could ask another question Doctor Pounceford and his friends had disappeared down the dark stairs, and in another instant she heard the hall door bang behind them.

To say that she was vexed and bewildered by the strangeness of their visit would give but a faint idea of the state of her mind when she sat down to reflect on what had just taken place.

On one point, however, she soon made up her mind. She decided that Doctor Pounceford should on no pretence whatever



enter her room again. She would have no more of his charity visits ; she would tell him so plainly when he called again.

It was mockery to call that afternoon's visit, with his two friends, a consultation on Freda's case. They scarcely noticed the child at all. What could this pretended consultation mean ?

It was no wonder that the strange proceedings of the medical trio occupied her mind during the rest of the day, and kept her sleepless far into the night.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

ALICE waited in her room, the day after the visit of the three medical men, until late in the afternoon, expecting every instant to hear Doctor Pounceford's knock at the door.

The day wore away, however, without his putting in an appearance, and finding at length that Freda required some milk, she put on her bonnet and mantle to go and fetch it. After bidding Freda to keep as quiet as a mouse until her return, and not to move if any one knocked, nor to answer if any one called to her, she went out, locking the door behind her and taking the key.

Little as she imagined it, this was destined to be an eventful day in Alice's destiny.

She had not proceeded twenty steps on her way down Dean Street before she almost ran into the arms of Mrs. Trimbley.

"Bless me, if it ain't Alice," cried the good woman. "Oh, ain't I glad to see you, that's all!" Then she took hold of Alice and hugged her, in the public street, like a mother who had found a long-lost child.

Alice did not return the embrace, but tried hard to disengage herself from what she considered a most ridiculous position.

"Oh, ain't I glad!" cried Mrs. Trimbley over and over again with tears of joy raining down her cheeks. "But come along to our place with me, my dear ; yes, come along this minute. Mr. Merryman's been wanting to see you this year and more."

In some surprise Alice inquired what Mr. Cameron's clerk wanted to see her about.

"Well, something for your benefit, that's certain. I've searched London through for you myself, an' so have Gavy. Mr. Cameron left word you was to be found, an' we've been doing our best, an' wearing our lives out. But to think that I should meet you just as I wasn't looking for you, at last!"

"Mr. Cameron desired you to find me?" cried Alice, her pale cheek flushing, her lips quivering nervously.

"Well, yes, he did—that is, he told his clerk to do so—an' we've all been looking for you, day an' night, as one may say. Why, that boy Gavy wanted a hand-organ an' a monkey to search for you an' Freda. Where is Freda? an' where have you been hiding yourself this twelve months and more?"

"I'm lodging close by," replied Alice rather distantly, "and will call on Mr. Cameron's clerk to-morrow. I'm going on an errand, so must bid you good day——"

"Oh, but you won't! You really must come with me," cried Mrs. Trimble all in a breath and keeping fast hold of Alice.

"I really cannot go with you," she replied coldly. "The message Mr. Cameron left for me has kept a long time—it will take no harm for another day. I have left Freda quite alone, and must hurry back to her at once."

It was impossible, say what she might, to shake Mrs. Trimble off, so at last Alice consented to take her to her room, and they went together, Mrs. Trimble keeping fast hold of her hand as though she feared to lose her in the crowd.

It was quite affecting to see Freda rush into Mrs. Trimble's motherly arms, the moment the good woman entered the room, and cling around her neck, uttering her fond childish endearments as of old.

"Heaven bless the dear child!" cried Mrs. Trimble, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron. "My heart's been empty ever since you left your mammy, my precious, an' now it's just too full to speak."

When she had calmed down a little she once more urged Alice to go immediately to Mr. Cameron's chambers. "I'm sure what the clerk has got to tell you, you'll be right glad to know; I has my own ideas on the subject," went on the good woman, quite ignoring Alice's evident wish to get rid of her as soon as possible. "What I've always said is that you are a much-wronged woman, my dear, there's no doubt of that. Well, now, suppose he did repent at last? 'tis my opinion that he did, an' left something handsome to you an' Freda."

"Do you mean by '*he*' my late husband?" asked Alice in her most cutting manner.

"Well, my dear, I know you'd reason to think him your hus-

band, an' you've been as true an' faithful to him as though he was that same, so do take my advice—an' 'tis the advice of one who never wished you wrong—you go to Elm Court this very afternoon ; go at once or you will be too late ; the old clerk never stays there after five o'clock, by any chance."

Mrs. Trimble became so persistent in her entreaties that Alice at last consented to go, provided Mrs. Trimble would remain and look after Freda until her return.

This the kind-hearted woman gladly consented to do, and rather unwillingly Alice at length departed.

Her expectations were not raised very high by what Mrs. Trimble had told her : a sum of money, or an annuity at best. Well, better that than slow starvation in a mean London lodging ; if it were but enough to take Freda to the seaside, and provide her with the little dainties her delicate appetite craved for, she would accept the legacy and waive all else.

Still it was in no very hopeful state of mind that she reached Elm Court and mounted the stair leading to Alex Cameron's chambers.

She knocked impatiently at the outer door and, without waiting for permission, opened it and entered.

The clerk looked up from his desk at this sudden intrusion, and quite started when he saw a tall gaunt woman staring at him defiantly ; at least that was his impression at a first glance.

Without any preliminary introduction Alice asked him rather abruptly if Mr. Cameron had left any message with him for her.

The old man rose up and looked at her searchingly, then shook his head with a sigh. Who could this wild, defiant-looking woman be ? She was not his sister's pretty daughter Alice, certainly. He had grown cautious also, since that mysterious visit of Lady Chineron to the inner chambers, so he replied drily :

"My good lady, you should remember that you are quite a stranger to me ; we lawyers are not in the habit of receiving strangers without some sort of an introduction."

"Oh, ah ! introduction ; well, I really don't know by what name to announce myself," she said bitterly ; she always felt bitter when the question of her name arose. "You haven't forgotten the tragedy that was once enacted in that inner room yet, have you ?"

"Heaven defend us !" exclaimed the old clerk with a shudder ; "that is a thing which still haunts me. Hist !" he continued, drawing near her and apparently forgetting in his excitement

that she was a perfect stranger to him, "Hist! I sometimes see, or dream I see, him open that door and beckon me towards him!"

The woman turned her face towards the door as he spoke, and grew a shade paler if that were possible; at any rate her lips lost every particle of colour.

"Well, it's no wonder he should haunt the place!" she said with a shudder. "The thought of his widow and child on the point of starvation may well trouble him, even in the family vault where they laid him to rest."

The old man trembled and looked at her searchingly once more, then he again asked her for her name.

"Oh, you will not find my name in the peerage," she replied with a cold sneer, "although I am the widow of a peer, and my father was for many years vicar of——"

"Was your father's name Mathers?" interrupted the old clerk excitedly.

"Yes, his name was Mathers and my name is Alice. Did you know my father?"

"Gracious goodness, surely you cannot be my sister's daughter!" cried the old clerk, peering into her worn face with glistening eyes.

"And you?—is your name Horace Merryman?" she asked, grasping his hand, with a look in her eyes that changed their hard pitiless expression as if by magic.

A cloud gathered over the old clerk's brow; although he had sought her so earnestly and would willingly share his last crust with her, yet he could not forget that he had heard her name coupled with shame, and she it was whose lightness had broken his much-loved sister's heart.

The loving light died out of Alice's eyes, the old bitter smile curled her lips once more. "Ah! you too turn against me! Why should my wrongs harden your heart towards me?"

"Heaven forbid! but if you are really the widow of Lord Chineron, why do you not claim your rank and your child's legal heritage?"

"Do not turn from me!" she entreated. "You know the law; you can help me. Except you I have not one friend in the world."

"I will never desert you, Alice; but I wish to heaven you had married some one in your own rank. I hope, at any rate, you have been left something to keep you from want; the world deals hardly with a woman who has to earn her bread. There's a

packet left for you in my charge by Mr. Cameron ; we had better examine the contents at once."

The old man arose and went to unbolt and unlock the inner office door.

He sighed deeply, more than once, as his trembling hands undid the fastenings. "Alas, how sadly my dream is ended!" he whispered under his breath. He had pictured to himself a gentle womanly creature, with bowed head and plaintive air, to whom he would hold forth a protecting hand, and whose life it would be his duty to brighten and cheer.

But this woman! this dark revengeful creature ; she would repel his love and stand aloof from his feeble offers of protecting care. Alas, for Alice! Her wrongs had made her quite unwomanly ; it was her fate to repel, not to excite pity, much less sympathy. Although Horace Merryman was the kindest and best-hearted of men, he found it impossible to welcome this woman, as he would like to have welcomed the daughter of his dead sister. He could not have this woman to cheer his hearth in his declining years ; he felt instinctively that she would rather darken the hearth, and render the home cheerless, of any man fated to spend his days with her. The shadow that cast a gloom over her life would keep the sunshine out of any home she might inhabit.

These and many other thoughts passed through the old clerk's mind before he returned from the inner office, bearing a small sealed packet in his hands.

Alice sprung from her seat and looked eagerly at him.

"Is it for me?" she cried breathlessly.

He did not speak, but held it towards her, then going to his usual seat, he sat down and bowed his head on his hands, as he leant forward on his office desk. He shrank from seeing her rage, if the contents of that packet should disappoint her expectations.

Suddenly he started and looked up, aroused out of his short reverie by a wild, hysterical cry.

Alice was holding a narrow slip of paper in her hand and crying like an excited child.

"Oh, don't," ejaculated the old man, quite frightened by her excited looks. "Pray be calm. What is the matter?"

"Look!" she cried wildly. "Look—that bit of paper lifts the shadow from my life and the cloud of shame from my brow—look!"

When Mr. Merryman did look at that slip of paper, and found

that it was nothing less than her marriage certificate, and proved beyond question that Alice Mathers had been legally married to George Bathwick Chineron, he laughed and wept in a breath, behaving, in a subdued way, almost as wildly as Alice herself.

"I must hasten and fetch Freda—nay, she shall be Lady Alfreda from henceforth. Heavens, to think that the daughter of an earl should be obliged to pass for years as the child of a gate porter! But I will be avenged on that proud, cruel countess. Yes, yes, I will mete her out measure for measure, until I bow her haughty head to the dust!"

She looked so dark and vengeful with her pale face and flashing eyes, so like a Nemesis of unappeasable wrath, that the old clerk shuddered and drew back.

The first ebullition of surprise over, he began to reflect that rank and fortune had come too late to Alice to make her either happy or amiable.

Poor Alice, she had brooded over her wrongs for so many weary years that she could not help rejoicing when at length the power was in her hand to repay her wrongs with interest.

As soon as she recovered some degree of composure she became anxious about Freda, and having secured the pocket-book with its precious contents about her person, she set off with all haste towards her lodging.

When she arrived within a few yards of her own street door she noticed that a knot of people were gathered around it, and a cab was in waiting outside.

With a quick presentiment of evil she dashed forward, to find a strange woman pulling Freda, who was terrified and crying for help, towards the cab.

With a bound resembling that of a lioness, Alice sprang on the woman and released the child from her grasp.

There was a shout from the crowd and some commotion, but Alice did not heed it. She did the wisest thing possible under the circumstances: she took up Freda in her arms and bore her away, without casting one look at the woman, whom she had flung prostrate on the pavement.

At the end of the street, observing that she was followed by some dozen women and boys, she hailed a passing hansom and was driven with all speed towards the Strand.

*(To be continued.)*



## Old-Fashioned Railway Travelling.

WE are all of us, of course, well aware that railway travelling was at one time very different from what it is now, but how different it was few save those who were old enough fifty or sixty years ago to take an intelligent and observant interest in it, have any accurate knowledge. To recall some of the peculiarities of railway travelling in those far-away times will therefore, it is hoped, in these days of universal movement, be of interest to a good many readers.

It is not, perhaps, surprising that the old stage-coach system was copied in many respects by the pioneers of the new mode of travelling. It is difficult indeed to break entirely with tradition, and it required a little experience to show how radically different the two things were. That railway travelling was but an improved method of stage-coaching, instead of being something essentially different, seems to have been the generally accepted idea at first. For several years, on the Stockton and Darlington Railway, old stage-coach bodies, placed upon railway axles and wheels, were drawn by horses ; or sometimes by the rather slower beam-action locomotives of that extremely primitive line.

When the Liverpool and Manchester opened in 1830, its first-class coaches were simply developments of those just mentioned being made to resemble three stage-coach bodies on one frame. The outside seats were there, the outside lamps, and all the rest of it. The passenger had to see his luggage hauled on to the roof, and at the journey's end had to be careful lest he should be knocked over by a portmanteau sliding down a steep board on to the platform. The windows were so small it was impossible to get a good view from them ; in fact, it was not always that you had any windows to look out of. Even second-class coaches at one time had merely a light roof or covering over them, the sides being quite open, so that the rush of air and the dust and cinders compelled the passengers to keep their eyes shut a good deal of the journey. There were usually seats on the roof of each coach, at the

ends, where one or two passengers could sit if they preferred to do so. In fine weather it was not so bad when running down-hill with little or no steam on, but under ordinary circumstances the ashes from the engine made it very unpleasant. A special kind of spectacles or goggles of fine wire gauze was made for the particular use and benefit of outside passengers, though indeed the inside ones often required them nearly as much. Armed with a pair of these the bold outside passenger could enjoy the view very well, if his time was not entirely occupied in holding his hat on or clutching the little rail on each side of the seat to prevent himself being jerked off his perch by the lively movements of the little 3 or 4 ton band-box beneath him.

At first the guards invariably rode outside, the under guard on the first coach, with his back to the engine ; the head guard, facing forwards, upon the last coach. They were supposed to make various gesticulations and signals to each other from time to time, with reference to things in general being all right with the train. They each had a brake to work when necessary, but the increasing speed of the travelling soon rendered the outside places more than flesh and blood could bear. Some instances of the guard getting nearly frozen to death having occurred, he was provided with a vehicle having a sort of projecting open box behind it, into which he could step from the covered portion of the van when he could spare a few minutes from the rather miscellaneous duties peculiar to railway guards. If a useful individual, the guard was certainly an ornamental one as well. On the Manchester and Leeds Railway it is recorded in 1840 that "the guards are dressed in flaming red coats and carry horns," whilst a little later the London and South Western guards' uniform was a blue coat with a scarlet collar and blue trousers with a red stripe down the seam.

The railway companies did not look upon refreshment-rooms at first with much favour, being afraid that the facilities for obtaining drink by their servants would lead to accidents. It is true that the Swindon and Wolverton refreshment-rooms dated from the opening of their respective lines, but there were none at the termini. People were expected to get what they wanted in the town before setting out on their journey. At some places a woman was allowed to retail biscuits and fruit, or other articles of an equally comforting and sustaining nature, from a

stall in the waiting room, but nothing more conducive to collisions than lemonade could be obtained on the company's premises by thirsty engine-drivers, or passengers choked with dust from outside travelling.

The fares were based, like so many other things in early railway administration, upon the stage-coach system, which was a very costly mode of getting about. Certainly, they were less than the coaches charged, if only for the sake of running the latter off the road, but they were far higher than at present. As an example, the first-class single fare from Euston to Birmingham was at one time thirty-two shillings and sixpence, only one shilling less than the first class *return* fare is now. This is perhaps an extreme case, and on some lines they have not been lowered so much as on others; but it is well within the mark to say that railway fares were fifty per cent. higher at first than they are now. The advantages of the rail over the road were appraised by the travellers of those days at "three times the speed for half the money," which, no doubt, when the saving of tips to coachmen and guards and of many hotel bills was taken into consideration, was not far from the truth. It was not unusual to charge higher fares for night travelling than for day, second-class coaches completely covered in and sheltered being provided instead of the dreadful open-sided ones used in the day time; five shillings extra was charged from London to Birmingham, second class, by night, making twenty-five shillings, exactly the present "second return." No cushions or linings were provided; a man of average height could not stand upright in the vehicle even with his hat off. People used to indulge in many ingenious speculations as to where on earth the directors obtained the extraordinarily hard wood of which the second-class seats were made. It has been said that to the Brighton Company belongs the credit of having first padded the seats of second-class coaches. The name of the still greater benefactor to humanity who did the same for the third-class seems rather uncertain.

But if the second-class passenger had literally a hard time of it, he of the third, on the short lines at any rate, often had no seat at all. Such an absurdity as a roof over his head was of course equally out of the question. The Cheap Trains Act of 1844 altered all that; but the principle of trying to make people go in higher classes than they could afford by making the others uncomfort-

able, was the foundation-stone of English railway policy for a very long time.

The undisguised wonder and admiration of the early railway writers at things which appear now most common-place, is quite refreshing in these highly-educated times when everybody knows all about everything. In an account of the Grand Junction (Birmingham to Liverpool and Manchester) Railway, written the year after its opening, the first thing the chronicler saw at the "station house" was from "ten to twenty enormous and handsomely-built carriages." As none of these vehicles contained more than three of the very smallest compartments, or was more than a foot or two longer than a horse-box is now; somewhat narrower and by no means so high, the expression "enormous" is rather amusing.

The engines seem to have impressed our friend of 1838 still more deeply. "One of them moves slowly towards you. The huge creature bellows at first like an elephant. Deep, slow and terrific are the hoarse heavings that it makes. There it is, roaring, groaning and grunting like a sea-horse, and spouting up steam like a whale." Having got over his wholesome dread of the "huge creature," and taken his seat outside one of the coaches, the writer falls into some more of his wonderful comparisons. "The engine before you seems to be some extraordinary animal which, with the swiftness of the eagle, has the power of impelling itself forward at a prodigious rate, while it hurls the world away behind it."

The Grand Junction engines, which aroused such contrary emotions in the breast of this gentleman, were little six-wheeled machines weighing from 12 to 14 tons in working order. They had "single" driving-wheels, some 5 feet, others  $5\frac{1}{2}$  feet, in diameter, and cylinders  $12\frac{1}{2}$  and 13 inches bore, with 18 inches stroke. The classical mythology was largely drawn upon to furnish their names, with a little assistance from Shakespeare. They were worked at pressures of steam varying from 50 to 60 lbs. on the square inch, and had small four-wheeled tenders of peculiar appearance, bearing the letters G.J.R.W. on their sides.

The sight of an in-coming train seems to put a climax to the excitable feelings of the writer just quoted. "The order and regularity, the dignity and importance of the train, give the

whole matter an air of national grandeur. Every carriage seems a royal *cortège*, every passenger a person of distinction."

In the early days of railways, serious scruples were entertained by many worthy people on the subject of Sunday travelling. Although they ran none but the mail trains on that day, some of the Grand Junction shareholders seem to have gone so far as to refuse such portion of their dividends as might be due to Sunday traffic, for the directors, in their first half-yearly report (December 31, 1837), state that "the nett profit for Sunday travelling amounts to six shillings per share, and the directors recommend to the proprietors that any shareholder who may refuse to receive it should be required to relinquish all claims to it afterwards, in order that it may be appropriated to charitable purposes." At any rate, these conscientious Sabbatarians may be credited with having the courage of their convictions.

One of the greatest difficulties the pioneers of railway travelling had to contend with, was the notion that it was unhealthy, and the obloquy thrown upon the new system by those interested in the old largely took the form of most reckless assertions to that effect. Horrible tales were circulated of the chilly damp of the tunnels and cuttings, and the lung and chest complaints it would cause. It was conclusively proved that the rapid motion would cause apoplexy. People's eyesight would be destroyed by things moving so quickly before them; nay, they would not even be able to breathe when going at such "an unheard-of velocity" as twenty miles an hour. Even more absurd reasons were advanced in opposition to railways. It was seriously asserted that all the iron in the country would be insufficient to supply them, and that consequently there would be none left for ordinary purposes. The iron rails would attract lightning, and render the climate so stormy that England would hardly be habitable. Experience of course soon disproved all this nonsense, and much more; people rushed into the opposite extreme, and from putting every obstacle in the way of the railway-makers, wanted to have lines connecting almost every village and hamlet in the country.

It is the custom now-a-days to consider a locomotive as decidedly indispensable to railway travelling; but it was not always so. Here and there, for short distances, a train did without one very well. Whether a traveller went from London to

Liverpool, or from Liverpool to London, he began and ended his journey without the aid of a locomotive. Instead of it, a slow-moving and dignified beam-engine dragged the train up-hill for about a mile with a strong rope running over little rollers laid between the rails. The rope went up one line and down the other, passing over a large drum at the engine-house, at the top of the incline, and round a horizontal wheel at the bottom. Trains coming down were regulated by hand-brakes for control over them, but the force of gravity was their only motive power.

On the London and Blackwall line the trains were pulled to and fro with wire ropes, by stationary engines fixed at each end of the line. It is level, only three and a half miles long, and was worked thus for fear of sparks setting fire to the warehouses and other property near it.

At Euston, where for some ten years locomotives were never seen, the porters used to push the trains out of the station and for a few yards beyond, till the first coach reached the hook of the big rope. The procession then sailed away at about ten miles an hour up to Camden Town, from which place a quaint little four-wheeled engine would take it on to Birmingham. Upon the Bolton and Leigh Railway, a feeder of George Stephenson's Liverpool and Manchester line, not only the trains, but their locomotives as well, were pulled up hill with a rope in this rather humiliating fashion. The first mile from Bolton was worked by horse-power, and as no less than three different systems of traction were thus employed upon hardly ten miles of line, the trains certainly did pretty well in going at an average rate of fourteen and a half miles per hour. By the way, one of the old Rainhill heroes, Hackworth's engine, "*Sanspareil*," which but for the misfortune of a cracked cylinder would not improbably have beaten Stephenson's "*Rocket*" at the locomotive trials, worked for many years upon the Bolton and Leigh Railway. It now rests from its labours side by side with its quondam rival in the peaceful seclusion of the Patent Office Museum at South Kensington.

In days when railway speed was a new experience people took much more interest in the rate at which they travelled than they do now; and one of the very earliest Bradshaws contains a table showing the rate of travelling per hour, elaborately made out for all rates of speed from *one mile an hour* to *four hundred*. To ascertain the speed you had only to count the number of seconds



occupied in passing between two consecutive quarter-mile posts. As the table goes into halves and quarters of seconds, it was never of any great use, and one can only hope that the four hundred miles an hour traveller of the future will find it serviceable. Another authority goes into this important matter, as it seems to have been considered, in a most scientific manner. Ascertain, he says, the diameter of the driving-wheels of the engine, and then proceed to count the number of fourth puffs in every ten and three-quarter seconds. If, however, the driving-wheels were not five feet, but five feet six inches, you counted every fourth puff in twelve seconds. Perhaps the outside passengers, and those journeying in open vehicles, were better placed for hearing the "beat" of the engine than travellers now are; at any rate it will be conceded, no doubt, that this interesting pastime was well calculated to relieve the tedium of railway travelling.

An important figure upon the rail in old times was the "policeman." This worthy combined many important offices in his own person. He was ticket collector, he was signalman, he was gate-keeper at the level crossing, he showed the first-class passengers into their numbered seats in the train. Being sworn-in as a constable, he carried handcuffs in the pockets of his swallow-tailed coat, and was often provided with a truncheon and rattle as well. A top-hat of massive construction protected his head, a stiff leather stock made him hold his head up, and a pair of straps compelled his white canvas trousers to assume the rigidity of outline then considered so highly desirable. It was suggested, though we do not know whether it was ever carried out, that the policemen stationed at the booking-offices and gates of the principal stations should be armed with brass-tipped staves, five feet in length. The British public of those days was by no means so peaceable and law-abiding as it now usually is. Calling out the military and swearing-in special constables were not by any means rare events, whilst the establishment of a regular police force in London and elsewhere was then so new an experiment that the railway companies doubtless thought it safer to rely for the protection of their property upon their own men than upon the raw and highly unpopular "Peeler" of the time.

The way in which the railways were regarded as sights and

shows, not simply as objects of public utility and convenience, seems very curious. For several years the Lime Street tunnel was one of the "lions" of Liverpool. It was whitewashed throughout, lighted with gas, and the names of the streets and buildings above were painted here and there for the information of travellers. An innkeeper at Camden Town, in 1838, "begs to inform his numerous friends and the public that he has appropriated the roof of his house for the use of his visitors, from which they will have an extensive view of the London and Birmingham Railway and of the metropolis, from fifteen to twenty miles round." As to the Greenwich Railway, which was the first line opened in London, it was "constructed in a form which will render it, as a work of art, one of the wonders of the metropolis." At the Deptford Station a wonderful sort of torpedo, called the Scorpion, eighty feet long, invented by Lord Dundonald, was shown as an attraction to travellers. The line runs from end to end upon arches, which no doubt rendered it "a work of art," and, like the neighbouring Croydon line, had a row of gas-lamps at each side like a street.

The managing director of the Greenwich Railway used to drive to Deptford Station, and having taken his seat in the train, the bugler who accompanied it played "See, the Conquering Hero Comes" until the journey's end. There was indeed a good deal of music in connection with the railways some fifty years ago or more. The opening of a new line was always celebrated with a prodigious amount of it, whilst at more places than one a brass band was employed for a time to play the trains in and out of the station. Possibly the bandsmen would soon get rather tired if this singular custom still obtained at some of the modern termini, but all that was changed a long while ago, and sense has replaced sentiment, to the total exclusion of the latter from railway management.

The intending passenger of fifty years ago was not always obliged to take his choice between first, second and third classes, for some lines used a fourth class in addition, as in fact was done in Scotland occasionally in quite recent times. As to what these fourth-class coaches were like, they had neither seats nor roofs, unless, under the Cheap Trains Act of 1844, the parliamentary fare of one penny per mile was charged by them, the ordinary third-class charge of about three half-pence being made by one

or two other trains in the day. The Midland, in 1845, had a fourth-class train, which took one hour and a quarter in going from Nottingham to Derby, a distance of sixteen miles.

The Manchester and Leeds (now part of the Lancashire and Yorkshire) also employed a fourth class at a penny a mile, by one train each way daily, passengers of all the other three classes being conveyed by the same train. This company made a bold bid for a share of the London and Manchester traffic by booking passengers to the metropolis *viâ* Hull, the fare including, besides the railway and steamer, omnibus to the Hunt's Bank Station at Manchester. As the through fare was only thirteen shillings and sixpence, four shillings less than the penny a mile rate by the direct line through Birmingham, it is to be hoped that such enterprise met with a due reward. The journey could hardly have taken less than thirty-six hours, so that the economy was more apparent than real. The parliamentary trains between London and Manchester *viâ* Newton Junction took about fifteen hours to cover two hundred and ten miles, but out of this half-an-hour was allowed for refreshments and changing trains at Birmingham. The "wagon passengers," as they were often called, were shunted into sidings unmercifully to let the more aristocratic trains pass; in fact, a north-country porter was once heard to reply to a remonstrance from some of these poor creatures, tired of waiting *locked-up* in their crowded and dirty dens, "Ye mun bide till yer betters gaw past; ye're only the nigger train."

At one time the railway companies regarded smoking with particular animosity. They considered it an accursed thing altogether and would have none of it, on any consideration. One of the principal lines gave notice that "smoking would not be allowed in the station-houses or in any of the coaches, even with the consent of the passengers." It is said that Lord Palmerston was once smoking a cigar at a railway station in the days of this prohibitive *régime*, when he was reminded by an official that he was transgressing the company's regulations. As he took not the slightest notice of the intimation, the official snatched the cigar from his lips, threw it on the ground and trampled upon it. Palmerston, admiring the man's stern performance of his duty, made inquiries about him, and used his influence to get him promoted to a higher and more lucrative position on the line.

Fear of fire, however, rather than any abstract objection to the use of tobacco, seems to have been the chief motive of the severe rules against smoking, rules which it is unnecessary to say largely defeated their own object.

Nor were smokers and third-class passengers the only persons to whom railway travelling was made unpleasant. The dons of Cambridge, afraid lest the good young men committed to their charge should run off to London or some such wicked place by the "new rail-road," had a clause inserted in the Eastern Counties Railway Act, giving them power to search the trains and stations for undergraduates of wandering tendencies, and also requiring the company's servants to give information, if called upon, as to the movements of such offenders. However, these ordinances, by their absurd severity, failed even more completely than the smoking regulations, remaining indeed a dead letter from the very first.

For several years, upon many lines, passengers' tickets were printed slips of paper torn out of a book. The necessary details being filled in with pen and ink in a most tedious and exasperating manner, the document was handed to you over an open counter like that of a shop. Return tickets did not come into general use for a long time and were often called "double-tickets," perhaps because the fares were, at first, usually double the single rate.

In the old times railway companies did not think of owning steamers, docks, hotels and what not, as they do now. There were a few steamboat services in connection with the trains at various places, but they were worked by independent parties. One of the first services of this kind was between Shoreham and Dieppe; the boats, which left only every other day, belonging to the General Steam Navigation Company. They started from the railway terminus at the Kingston Wharf, in Shoreham Harbour, and called, half-an-hour later (weather permitting and during daylight only), at Brighton Chain Pier. From Dieppe the passengers went by diligence to Rouen, whence they took the newly-opened railway to Paris, arriving there, if all went well, in something under twenty-four hours from leaving London by the Brighton Railway. You could also go in 1845 from Shoreham to Havre once a week, and from there to Rouen, either by diligence or up the Seine in a

small steamer. These Shoreham boats ran for several years, till the railway company commenced a service of its own from Littlehampton, which in its turn has disappeared in favour of the Newhaven route. People were booked through from London to Paris, but the fares were about double what they are now and the accommodation very inferior. There was a limited tidal service daily between Dover and Boulogne, but London was the great point of departure for the Continent, and continued to be so for the first fifteen or twenty years of the railway era.

In the thirties and early forties the practice of naming the coaches, instead of numbering them, prevailed on some lines, but it soon went out of fashion. The names were such as the stage-coaches usually bore: "Greyhound," "Delight," "Traveller," "Harlequin," "The Times," "The Globe," "Wellington," "Victory," for example, were the names of some of the Liverpool and Manchester railway carriages about the year 1836, but as the number of vehicles increased the names were given up. The system emigrated to America, whence it returned to its native land, after fully thirty years' absence, with the Pullman cars for the Midland Railway. The latter company is gradually taking to the more business-like numbers instead, but, elsewhere, railway managers seem to think a name as necessary to a Pullman as their predecessors did half a century back for the little coaches of the Grand Junction or Liverpool and Manchester lines. The names had peculiar inconveniences, sometimes of a kind which no one would now think of. It is said that when Napoleon's old general, Soult, was in England in 1838 and making a tour to Liverpool and other large towns, the railway authorities were horrified at finding, after his train had started, that the gallant marshal was in a coach bearing the ill-omened name of Waterloo! He was taken ten and three-quarter miles in ten minutes in part of the run, so it is to be hoped he forgot the affair in admiration of what his hosts could do in the way of travelling.

Many stations were familiar to railway travellers forty or fifty years ago, the names of which are now nearly forgotten. How many South Eastern passengers know the name of Bricklayers' Arms Station, now the chief London goods depôt, but for many years a passenger terminus? At one time nobody ever went to Dover or Brighton without stopping at Redhill, or Reigate as it

was called ; yet no Dover train ever goes within miles of it now, and you might travel between London and Brighton a long time by the fast trains without discovering the place. On the London and North Western, the "first-class station" at Tring, where the expresses used to stop, and Wolverton, with its great refreshment-rooms, sacred to pork-pies and boiling coffee, are almost unknown. The Great Western passenger who rushes through Didcot in the "Dutchman" or the "Zulu," little reckes that faster trains than any now running once regularly called there ; the fifty-three miles from town having often been run, at the time of the "battle of the gauges," in from forty-seven to fifty minutes.

On the whole we have great reason to be proud of our railways and what they have done for us ; the words of the shrewd Quaker, Mr. Edward Pease, who established the Stockton and Darlington Railway seventy years ago, have been amply fulfilled. "Let the country," said he, "but make the railways and the railways will make the country." Most of the progress made has been effected by the healthy stimulus of competition alone, and although in some parts of the country we could do with a little more of it even now, there seems no reason to suppose that the English lines will not advance in efficiency and prosperity as much in the future as they have done in the past, or that they will not continue to play a leading part in the well-being of the land of their birth.

W. B. PALEY.

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## Clare.

### I.

RIVERSMEAD had been in the possession of the Dormer family for many generations : a fine estate and one that its successive owners had taken every care of. There had been no profligates or spendthrifts amongst the Dormers, to waste the revenues or diminish the acres : a respectable and respected family always.

John Dormer was but three-and-twenty when he succeeded his father. An only son and, from having been delicate as a lad, without a profession, he married very soon after his father's death and settled down on his estate, devoting himself much to county and magisterial business. A few years later he entered Parliament as Conservative member for his county and had held his seat undisputed ever since. An upright, honourable and excellent man, but having few weaknesses himself, rather inclined to be somewhat intolerant with those who were not equally well balanced ; an intolerance that leaned towards hardness as he grew older, and that made him more respected than loved.

Mrs. Dormer was charming. A lovely girl of eighteen when she married, years only seemed to add to her beauty, and at forty-five she looked quite fifteen years younger. It was difficult to believe she could possibly be the mother of the fine stalwart sons and well-grown daughters, who all adored her, and regarded her as their best friend and most cherished companion. She was clever, accomplished, kind-hearted and generous, charitable in word and deed and endowed with a never-failing tact. What wonder that Mrs. Dormer was the most popular woman in the county ; and her house considered one of the pleasantest in London.

The Dormers were a large family : Ernest, the eldest son, in the Guards ; Dorothea and Olive, twin-daughters ; Gerald at Oxford, Frank at Eton, Clare, who had just been presented, Helen, Jack and Ruby, the three latter still in the school-room. They were all healthy, handsome, bright young people, not one of whom had ever caused their parents any anxiety or unhappiness.

Fairleigh was only three miles from Riversmead, and consequently the Græmes, to whom it belonged, were the Dormers' nearest neighbours. Lord George Græme, a younger son of the Duke of Ben Lomond, had, in the time of John Dormer's father, married Miss Leigh, the heiress of Fairleigh, and their son Malcolm had inherited the property from his mother. He was a handsome, dashing young fellow, and had begun life in the army, but soon tiring of the monotony and irksome restraint of soldiering in times of peace, sold out and spent several years travelling abroad in pursuit of big game, going to many (in those days) little known regions for this purpose. Then he returned home, and hunted the hounds in his own country and married a bright little Irish girl, the Lady Geraldine O'Brien, daughter of the Earl of Killarney; "a penniless lass, wi' a lang pedigree." A son was born to them, and then one sad December day, poor Malcolm Græme was carried home dead from the hunting field, to which he had ridden out so gaily in the morning.

Poor little Lady Geraldine, only twenty and a widow! Her baby son was scarce three months old. It was indeed a tragedy. Her widows' weeds were still new when people began to wonder how soon the bright, attractive little woman would marry again, and who would be poor Malcolm Græme's successor; but she disappointed all expectations on this score, remaining faithful to the memory of the husband whom she had adored, and been adored by, during their too short married life, and devoting herself with all her impulsive and affectionate nature to her boy, who, truth to tell, she spoilt most terribly.

Mrs. Dormer and Lady Geraldine were firm friends; they had many tastes in common, and in her widowhood the latter found much help and kindness at Riversmead. In all business matters Mr. Dormer was both able and willing to advise her, and in his wife she found comfort and help in many ways. The children too were fond of the little fatherless Willie, and Lady Geraldine was always glad that he should have the young Dormers as playfellows.

"Helen," said Lady Geraldine, as she entered Mrs. Dormer's pretty morning-room, one warm August day, some nine years after Malcolm Græme's death, "I've come as usual to ask a favour—*do* be kind and grant it. Dr. Newton thinks I want a breath of fresh air, so says I must go to the sea-side for a month

or six weeks, and I want you to lend me a child to go too. Willie will be so dull alone, without any playfellows, so do let me take one of your chicks with us."

"My dear Geraldine, I shall be delighted ; do you want a boy, or would Clare do?"

"Clare, by all means ; your boys are all older than Willie, and I am sure he and Clare will get on splendidly."

"That is charming ; Clare has been looking a little pale, and I longed to send her to the sea, but it is difficult to arrange for *one*, when so many have to be considered."

Thus it was arranged. Clare Dormer went to the sea-side with Willie and his mother. It was a time of enchantment to the two children ; the sands, the shells, all delighted them, they were capital companions ; Clare a little old for her age, Willie a little young for his. She was almost motherly to the boy, who was in reality only one year younger than herself, and he looked up to her with deep admiration, and from this time dated a friendship that never decreased, but seemed to grow stronger as they grew older. Clare was a sedate little girl, with a very clear sense of right and wrong ; Willie, a perfect butterfly, inheriting his father's restlessness and dislike of restraint and much of his mother's warm-hearted Irish impulsiveness.

When Willie Græme was old enough to go to school, his troubles began. He was handsome, winning, generous and quick—but alas ! terribly idle and wayward, impatient of control, and only too easily led into any mischief ; he had far too much pocket-money and spent it freely, which no doubt helped to make him popular with his companions, but often brought him into trouble with the masters. As to lessons he hated them—all except music, for that he had a really natural taste, and seemed to learn without any trouble ; in games he excelled, being quick of eye and hand, active and strong.

In the holidays Lady Geraldine continued to spoil her boy more than ever—he did what he pleased—she could not bear to deny him anything ; he was so winning, so handsome, so affectionate, and her only one. He repaid her with the warmest love, and she never found fault or blamed him for anything. It was sadly injudicious training for one of Willie's disposition, and Mrs. Dormer often sighed as she thought how hard he would find the battle of life after a boyhood and youth of such indulgence.

Clare was still his friend and confidante, and she often gently remonstrated with him on his careless ways, and lamented the many scrapes he got into. He took her chiding most amiably, always promising to try and do better for the future: "But you don't know the temptations one has at school, Clare; if I were with *you* always, I should always be good," he would say.

At eighteen Willie went to Oxford. He had been only one term there when his mother died. Lady Geraldine had never been strong, and for the last few years seemed to grow gradually weaker and more fragile, but the lad had never realized the possibility of losing her, and the end was a great shock. He was overwhelmed with sorrow, and torn with remorse for all the trouble and anxiety she had suffered on his account, and freely poured out all his grief both to Mrs. Dormer and to Clare. Clare was nineteen at this time, a very lovely, charming girl, gentle and refined. She had been presented and spent one season in London. Her twin elder sisters had both made brilliant marriages, and Clare was as much admired as they had been. She had had two very good offers, but gently and firmly declined both, and neither Mr. nor Mrs. Dormer cared to press her in the matter. It never occurred to them that the old friendship for Willie Græme had anything to do with these refusals, and even Clare herself did not realize how the image of her dearly-loved old playfellow and still friend came between her and all other men.

Lady Geraldine's only brother came to Fairleigh for his sister's funeral, and Willie spent a few sad days with him there before returning to Oxford. When the long vacation arrived Willie went abroad with a friend. He wrote to Clare, saying he could not come home to face the sad blank, and though not seeing him was a great disappointment, she felt his disinclination was only natural.

Frank Dormer, the third of the Riversmead boys, was at Oxford also, but at a different college to Willie. He was a grave, studious lad, rather a prig, and so they had never had much in common. Two or three times, in writing home after the long vacation, he mentioned Willie, and Mrs. Dormer sighed sadly as she read, "Græme is in a very fast set. I see very little of him, but hear a good deal;" or, "Every one is talking of Græme's extravagance," or other sentences of the sort. Willie wrote occasionally both to Mrs. Dormer and to Clare, but his letters were

short and did not tell much—writing had always been a difficulty to him, as was indeed all sedentary employment. Then came a report of some much worse than usual scrape. Mr. Dormer heard of it at his club and came home much annoyed.

"Willie Græme is going dreadfully to the bad, I hear," he said to his wife. "I can't have him coming to Riversmead in the vacation. He is not at all a desirable companion for our young people."

"Oh, John, he is really not a bad boy—only rather weak."

"A weak person is often very mischievous," said Mr. Dormer, "and Græme is in a very bad set."

"Poor boy, he has no one to look after him now his dear mother is gone."

"He is not a baby. He should be able to take care of himself."

Clare was in the room during this conversation between her father and mother. It troubled her not a little.

"Oh, mamma," she said afterwards, "you won't give Willie up. Papa is so hard to him."

"Papa does not mean to be hard, dear. I will certainly not give Willie up, but I fear he is not wise in his friendships."

Three years passed. The Dormers frequently met Willie Græme in London, and occasionally he ran down to Fairleigh for a few days, generally bringing a party of friends to shoot or hunt. He was always the same bright, affectionate young fellow to Mrs. Dormer and Clare; but they heard most disturbing tales of his wildness and extravagance. He had left Oxford, and was living in rooms in St. James' Street, which he had furnished in the most ultra-extravagant fashion. He was so handsome, so clever, "such capital company," as every one said, so generous with his money, and alas! so totally unable to say "No," that his popularity was enormous. Men and women were alike attracted by him; he was asked everywhere, and was the life and soul of every party and gathering. He had a charming tenor voice, which made him much in request; was a capital shot, a first-rate lightweight rider and, as in his boyhood, a good cricketer and athlete. All this unfortunately threw him much into a very fast set. Willie not only spent money, but lent money—he could never refuse a friend a loan, nor decline to back a bill. He was so indy, so pleasant, and alas, so *unstable*—the one thing in which

he never wavered was his love for Clare. The childish friendship had ripened into warm affection, and each time he met her at dance, garden-party, or wherever it might be, he thought her lovelier and sweeter than ever. No declaration ever passed between them, and Mr. Dormer so discouraged Willie's coming either to Riversmead or the house in Belgrave Square, that Mrs. Dormer felt she must do all she could to prevent Clare's affection for her old friend becoming anything more.

"I hope there's no nonsense between Clare and Græme?" Mr. Dormer said several times to his wife.

"Only the old friendship, as far as I know. I do not think Clare would conceal it from me if Willie had ever spoken to her of anything further;" but though she answered thus, Mrs. Dormer could not help feeling that Clare's affections were given in more than a *friendly* way to her old playfellow.

Shortly after this conversation the Dormers went abroad. Mrs. Dormer had not been very strong for some time, and thorough change was deemed advisable. Riversmead was shut up and they spent more than a year on the continent. It was a very pleasant year to Clare in many ways. She thoroughly enjoyed all the new scenes they visited, and they met many agreeable people, having letters of introduction to foreign notabilities in most places they went to, which introduced them to much good foreign society. The one drawback to Clare's happiness was the very disquieting account they heard from time to time of Willie Græme. He never wrote himself—they had never been in the habit of corresponding since he had left Oxford—but Ernest and Gerald often said a word about him, and Mr. Dormer, when he went home to attend to his parliamentary duties, heard many reports of his extravagance and folly.

"I hear he gambles, bets, and some say drinks," wrote the latter. "Even his uncle, Lord Killarney, who is by no means particular, is disgusted with his folly, and says he is nearly ruined."

Then Ernest wrote, "Græme is going it, and no mistake! I met him at Richmond the other day with such a party—ladies of the ballet and a lot of rowdy men—such a row as they kicked up, and Willie appeared to be paymaster for the whole crew. I hear he is spending money like water."

The next news came from Mr. Dormer. "Willie Græme has



come to utter smash. He is mixed up in several most discreditable affairs. You must have nothing further to do with him," he wrote to his wife.

Poor Clare. She heard all this and her heart was wrung. "Poor, poor Willie," she thought. "It all comes of your not being able to say 'no.' You are too confiding and generous, and people take advantage of you. *Weak*, you may be, but *bad*, I will not believe."

When the Dormers at length returned home—it was late in the spring—they spent only a short time in London, and then went to Riversmead. They had never met Willie, but heard of him on every side. Old friends shook their heads and said really the reports were so bad they could no longer know him. Clare longed to meet him—she did not like to write, and felt her mother would not approve of her doing so—but she had to go to Riversmead with her longings unsatisfied.

Then the final crash came. Fairleigh was to be sold. Willie Græme, not yet three-and-twenty, was ruined and his home must go. His career of folly and extravagance had ended very soon.

A few weeks later the Dormers heard he was at home—alone—and probably for the last time. Mrs. Dormer would have liked to go to him, but Mr. Dormer would not hear of it.

"Græme is thoroughly worthless and unprincipled," he said. "I don't wish to have anything further to do with him."

Clare rebelled inwardly at this dictum. "Why, why is papa so hard?" she thought. She grew very pale and thin during these days.

Mrs. Dormer sighed as she saw her. She could not but think the news from Fairleigh had something to do with her daughter's altered looks.

One day in July Mr. Dormer said he heard that Græme was to leave Fairleigh the following morning, but no one seemed to know where he was going.

Clare's heart seemed to stand still. Should she never see him again? It was hard, hard! and now the unhappy girl realized only too well that all her love was given to her old friend.

That evening, after dinner, Clare felt she must go out, the house seemed to stifle her, so wrapping a soft white shawl round her shoulders, she slipped unobserved into the garden, and opening a small gate into the wood which lay between Riversmead

and Fairleigh, strolled along listlessly and sadly, her heart filled with sorrowful thoughts.

"Willie, Willie, Willie," she almost sobbed to herself, "you can't be so bad as they say. My poor boy, why don't you come to us? Papa could not be so hard if he saw you; people always tell the worst."

She paced along the mossy woodland path—where she and Willie and her brothers and sisters had so often played as happy, merry, light-hearted children—heedless of everything but her sorrow. The lingering daylight was slowly dying away; she felt she should turn homewards.

Suddenly she saw another person was walking along the path, with head bent down and hat drawn low over his face. He drew nearer, yes! she could not be mistaken: "Willie!" and she held out both hands towards him.

"Clare!" and in one moment he was beside her. "Oh, my darling! I did not hope, I could not *dare* to hope, to meet you here. I have so longed for one last word, but they told me Mr. Dormer said I was not to come to Riversmead."

"Oh, Willie, I am so grieved and so is mamma."

"My Clare, I am not worth grieving for. I have made such a mess of my life. Forget me, dearest little friend, my one love. Oh! Clare, if I had had you with me always, how different things might have been. But I was first weak and silly, and then I heard your father would not let any of you have more to do with me, and then I grew careless and—but why trouble you, dearest, with such a tale?"

"Oh! Willie, is it too late?" This was no time for reserve and coyness; these young people forgot that no spoken words of love had ever passed between them before, and Clare, sobbing bitterly, with her head on Willie's shoulder, felt that she had always belonged to him and he to her, and that now she was to lose him.

"Too late! Oh! Clare, is it possible that you do care for me a little? Too late! oh, this is hardest of all. I cannot, must not, think of you and love. I have forfeited all right to speak by my mad, blind folly. Forget me, dearest; do not let grief for so worthless a creature ruin your young life," and Willie Græme, utterly overcome, covered his eyes with his hand, whilst hard dry sobs shook him fiercely.

"Willie, Willie, don't ; it is *not* too late, it can never be too late. I *do* love you and will never forget you. Make a new beginning, dear, and I will help you."

Half-an-hour later they parted at the gate into Riversmead garden. The time had sped only too quickly, but Clare dared not stay later ; her mother would anxiously wonder at her absence, and she and Willie had agreed to keep their own counsel till things were more settled. She promised to meet him next day to talk over their future plans, and with one embrace they parted, Clare feeling that the world was far brighter to her than it had been when she passed through that gate nearly two hours earlier.

Mr. and Mrs. Dormer were sitting in the dim evening twilight, at the drawing-room window, when she entered and, saying she felt tired, Clare kissed them both and went to her own room ; she thus escaped with all traces of her unwonted emotion unobserved.

## II.

"YES, Clare, Fairleigh must go. There is no help for it, dear. I have spent the whole night, every moment since I parted with you, in thinking if it were possible to save the old home, but, alas ! it must be sold. Even then, I shall have very, very little left. Oh, my darling, you will have to give me up. Mr. Dormer will never let you bind yourself to such a miserable wreck as I am."

"Willie, I will never give you up. I know papa will be vexed. We shall have a struggle, but I will never give you up."

Clare and Willie had met in the woods again as they had agreed the previous evening. They spent several hours together, and then Willie walked home with her to Riversmead.

"I will go and tell your father at once," he said. "We will have no underhand work for him to reproach us with afterwards."

"Then I will go with you, Willie ; it will be best for him to see us together," Clare answered bravely. "We will go to him first and then to mamma."

Mr. Dormer was in his study and was overwhelmed with surprise when he saw his daughter's companion. The interview was a painful one, but on the whole, Mr. Dormer was helpless. Clare was of age ; she could please herself. It was no use Mr. Dormer saying he would not allow any engagement ; Clare was firm.

"Of course I know we must wait," she said, "but I am content to do so. I will never marry any one else. If you choose to turn me out of the house, papa, I must try to earn my bread till Willie is ready for me." Nothing would shake her determination.

Mr. Dormer could only repeat, "I refuse my consent absolutely." He ignored the young man utterly after he had first stormily reproached him with all his misdeeds.

Willie only answered sadly that what he said was too true. He knew how grievously he was to be blamed, but he was still young enough to turn over a new leaf and he meant to do so.

Then Clare took him to her mother. Mrs. Dormer was no less surprised than her husband had been, but imagined at first that he had merely plucked up courage to come and bid his old friends farewell; but when Clare, her hand in Willie's, told her mother that she and Willie were engaged and meant to wait for each other till they could marry, she exclaimed in a tone of horror:

"Oh! Clare, what will papa say? My dear children, I fear this cannot be."

"Papa knows—we have been to him first."

"Yes, Mrs. Dormer, we knew how hard it would be, so we went to Mr. Dormer first. I *know* you cannot either of you approve—I feel how wrong I am in binding Clare——"

"You don't bind me, Willie; I bind myself," she interrupted.

Poor Mrs. Dormer knew not what to say; the old love for Lady Geraldine and her fatherless boy fought sadly with her love for her daughter and desire for her welfare. Willie had proved so unable to fight his own way in the world, how could she intrust her dear Clare to him? It was indeed a struggle—and she knew, too, how strongly her husband would disapprove—but she saw that Clare's heart was given, and knew how steadfastly she would hold to her love, now that he was in trouble, sorrow and difficulty—and Willie, with his warm heart but weak nature, would be so strengthened and encouraged by one like Clare, whose character had all the strength his lacked, added to a very true and loving nature.

The days that followed were by no means easy to Clare. Her father scarcely spoke to her, and she felt it would not do to pour out all her hopes and fears for Willie to her mother, recognizing that the latter's loyalty to her husband would not allow her to show

the sympathy that Clare never doubted she felt. Willie wrote daily—he was in London, settling up his affairs and trying vainly to obtain some employment—and Clare spent much time writing long letters of encouragement to him, full of hopes of happiness in the future, and showing in each line how deep her love for him was.

At last Willie wrote that he feared it was impossible to get anything to do in England, but that a friend who had large tracts of farm land in Australia begged him to return there with him (he was on a visit to England for a few months) and invest the small amount of money left, after all debts were paid, from the sale of Fairleigh, in the colony. "Jack Speirs says I can stay with him till I see my way and that he will help me as much as possible with advice, &c. He is a thorough good, steady fellow, and doing well, and I could not do better than accept his offer, were it not that it almost ties me to a colonial life for many years to come—and how could I ask you to give up home and friends, and all you have been accustomed to, for a life of 'roughing it' and almost isolation? Oh! Clare, you had better give me up, and then it won't matter what I do, or where I go."

Clare did not hesitate to write and urge Willie to accept Mr. Speirs' invitation. She felt he had a much better chance of beginning life afresh in a new country, away from all the old temptations, and she would gladly join him as soon as he was ready for her. It was a hard letter to write, and it cost her many tears, but she put all thoughts of self aside; it was best for Willie, and after all she would have *him*. What more could she want? But she dreaded the long separation terribly—however, there seemed no other course open.

When all was settled, Willie paid a hurried visit to Riversmead. It was indeed a sad farewell. Mr. Dormer refused to see him, but Mrs. Dormer's kind heart would not let him go without a few affectionate words. She was full of misgivings for the future. Clare's influence no doubt could keep him straight when they were together, but was it strong enough to be a safeguard when seas rolled between them? But she wished him God-speed, and prayed inwardly that he might be helped to do what was right, and have strength of mind to resist all temptations to a return to the follies which had already cost him so dear.

Clare tried hard to be very brave, but the parting, and for an indefinite time, was a sore trial ; but she bore up well and strove to comfort Willie, promising to be ready whenever he was able to fetch her. "I must learn all sorts of useful things," she said, smiling through her tears, "to fit me to be a colonist's wife."

"Oh! Clare, and to think that if I had not been such a fool, we might have been happy together at Fairleigh!" Poor Willie's heart was filled with sorrow at parting from Clare, and remorse for his own past folly, the consequences of which he was feeling so bitterly.

Letters came from Gibraltar, Malta, and indeed from each port at which Willie's ship touched. His old dislike to writing seemed to be gone, with many other things of the past. He wrote pages, and Clare eagerly read and re-read each word, and wrote long loving letters in reply ; letters were her chief comfort in these days.

A year passed. Willie had bought land and was very busy, "not making a pile yet," he wrote, "but keeping things going." Mr. Speirs, too, who had known Mrs. Dormer slightly, wrote her a kind note, not mentioning Clare, but saying he felt sure she would be glad to hear that her old friend Lady Geraldine's son was working so well and steadily. "He is a capital colonist, so active, energetic, and enjoys such splendid health ; nothing seems to daunt him, and difficulties seem to melt before his determination to overcome them." This letter was of course read by Clare ; it made her so happy. "Surely papa will relent now," she said, but Mr. Dormer returned it to his wife, after reading it, in silence.

Clare made herself very busy at home, looking well into housekeeping matters for her mother, instructing herself in dairy-work and poultry rearing. She was active, cheerful and happy. Willie's letters were as fond as ever, and she felt that each day brought her nearer to him. She did not go out in society much. Helen had come out now, and Clare laughingly said, "She is quite enough for mamma to manage in the way of chaperoning." Clare's engagement was never mentioned, and people wondered why the beautiful, charming Miss Dormer did not marry. "Had she had a disappointment?" they asked each other. Except Mr. and Mrs. Dormer, her own family were no wiser than the rest of the world. Mr. Dormer's dislike to her "entanglement," as he called it, was as strong as ever, and he begged that no one should be informed of it.



Willie's exile had lasted two years, when Clare received a letter which excited her greatly, and disturbed the calm tenor of her life. He wrote saying that he had been offered, through the influence of Mr. Speirs, a capital government appointment, which would at once give him a sufficient income to fully justify him in marrying, and the pay would increase annually, finally entitling him to retire with a really substantial pension. His own farm was prospering wonderfully, and he would still be able to work that. He had built a capital house, and called it "Fairleigh," in memory of the old home in England. The one drawback was that he must take up the new appointment immediately, and could see no prospect of leave to England for at least three years. "They have kindly agreed to leave it open till I can have a telegraphic answer to this from home. I have told them I wished to consult my *friends*. So, Clare, the decision rests with you—and it means this, dear one: I cannot do without you any longer; there is no good reason why we should wait, but as I cannot go home, will you—Clare, I hardly dare ask it—*will you come out to me?* I could meet you on landing, and we could be married at once, and then come here to our own home, the new 'Fairleigh.' Send me one word by telegraph, 'yes' or 'no'; if the latter, I shall know I have asked too much, shall refuse the appointment, and hope to come home in a year to fetch you." There was much more in the letter, but this was the important part. The request was so unexpected, it came as a shock to Clare. She had looked forward to the time when she should be married to Willie and go with him to the new country, but the idea was that *he* should come home to fetch her; that they should be married—quietly enough, no doubt—in the small country church near both Riversmead and Fairleigh, where his people and hers had worshipped together for so long; this was what she had pictured. And now she was asked to do this other and much more terrible thing—to go all alone, for of course it was not to be expected that her father or any of her family could accompany her: the long sea voyage, the strange country—oh, how could she do this? Mrs. Dormer was away from home; she and Helen had gone to stay with Dorothea for some gaieties. Clare had no one to consult. She knew the answer must go soon. She knew it was useless to ask Mr. Dormer for advice. There was no one to help her. She alone and unaided

must make the decision. She read Willie's letter again and again, took it into her favourite wood, and there walked up and down, unheeding the singing of the birds, the rustling of the leaves—she could hear nothing but Willie's voice saying, "Come to me, Clare." It was a hard struggle, and Clare felt as if she were years older when she at last returned to the house. She had to master all emotion and take her place at the luncheon table with her father, Jack and Ruby.

Mr. Dormer was always silent, but the two latter chattered incessantly, and relieved Clare of the effort to talk.

"I am going to drive to Fairtown this afternoon, papa ; can I do anything for you ?"

Clare's voice shook a little as she asked the question.

Happily Mr. Dormer was unobservant, and did not notice how her face flushed, and the usual calm serenity of her manner was replaced by a nervous agitation that she found it impossible to repress.

"No, Clare, nothing. You might take the children with you."

"Not this afternoon, please, papa."

Clare felt she could not bear the society of even these un-noticing young people. She was going to send off her telegram, and the time spent in driving to the town must be devoted to a final quiet "think" over her answer. She had not, or persuaded herself that she had not, yet made up her mind.

Mrs. Dormer's cobs were happily very quiet and steady-going animals, as Clare let them go pretty well as they liked that afternoon. Her brain was in a fever. Oh ! why was her mother not at home to help her to decide rightly ? It was a terrible responsibility. The cobs seemed to have flown. Clare could not believe her eyes when she saw the small country town post office in front of her. Mechanically she drew up at the door and got out of the carriage, but she walked into the little office firmly enough. Her hand shook as she took up the pencil to write her message. One moment she hesitated after writing Willie's address ; then, her lips firmly pressed together, her head held high, she wrote the one word he had asked for, "Yes." Hurriedly she paid the sum demanded, then walked out into the street again, took her seat in the carriage, and gathering up the reins drove off. She could not go home just yet ; she must have some time alone to regain her wanted calmness. Her head was throbbing, aching,

burning—the quick drive through the open air might in some measure relieve her—so she drove on and on, through long country lanes, choosing those that were most unfrequented, making the ponies go at a speed that was very unusual, as they were seldom hurried out of a sedate trot, but to-day Clare felt rapid motion was what she wanted.

The groom wondered what was up with Miss Dormer. The quiet country drive bored him inexpressibly. Tom liked a town, "where there was something to see."

It was late when Clare returned home, and she went straight to her room to dress for dinner, but to dine alone with Mr. Dormer was more than she could bear, so she sent to say she had a bad headache, and begged he would excuse her, and feverishly drank the cup of tea her maid brought, but could not eat anything.

"Mamma comes home the day after to-morrow," she thought. "I will say nothing till then. She must tell papa for me."

Next morning Clare was able to take her place at the breakfast table as usual. She was pale, and there were dark circles round her eyes, but she had regained her self-control, and was able to answer "yes" to Mr. Dormer's inquiry as to whether her head was better. The die was cast; she must not be foolish. After all it was not a very dreadful thing to do. Many girls, she had heard, went out to India in the same way, to be married. Of course she knew her parents would be vexed, but her marriage altogether was not what they liked, and this would only be one little "rub" the more.

"Oh, Clare, dearest, I don't think Willie should have asked such a sacrifice," Mrs. Dormer exclaimed when, on her return home, Clare told her mother of Willie's letter and her reply. "This will make your father more opposed than ever to your engagement. Three years is not very long to wait."

"Please, mamma, do not try to shake me now. I have given my word to Willie. It is not what I ever expected, but I feel it is best for us *both*. *He* wants me very much; you have Helen now to take my place, and Ruby also growing up. The loneliness is so hard for Willie, I feel I might be a help and comfort to him," Clare pleaded.

"Your father has always hoped you'd change your mind," Clare.

"But *you* know me too well to think that, mamma."

Mr. Dormer was angry beyond words when his wife told him of Clare's intentions. He had very strict ideas of propriety and seemliness, and that a daughter of his should contemplate such a course appeared terrible in his eyes.

He never spoke to Clare on the subject, but she saw by his manner, never very genial since the day she had declared her determination to marry Willie Græme, how strongly he disapproved.

The weeks passed very slowly till Willie's letter, written on receipt of Clare's telegram, arrived. He thanked her almost passionately for her sweet goodness in taking such a step for his sake. "I have no words, dearest, in which adequately to tell you what joy your 'yes' has given me. I have so longed for you, Clare, more than ever lately. I have not felt very well, and the anxiety after my letter had gone, and till your telegram came, was almost more than I could bear." He went on to say that if she could start by a certain date, Mr. Speirs' brother and his wife were coming out by the ship "Australasia" and would be so delighted if she would travel with them. This would be so much pleasanter than going quite alone that Clare felt she must take advantage of the offer. The following post brought a kind note from Mrs. William Speirs, saying they had heard from her brother-in-law that Miss Dormer was going out, and hoped they might arrange to travel together.

Clare's preparations were soon made. Her parting with Mrs. Dormer was most trying to both. It was a sad wrench. Mr. Dormer kissed his daughter coldly, but said no word. Dorothea and Olive, who strongly disapproved of their sister's marriage, wrote to say they "wished her well," but did not offer to come and bid her farewell in person.

Ernest met her in London, and took her to the hotel where the Speirs were staying, but poor Clare felt sadly forlorn next day on board ship, when almost all the other passengers were surrounded by fond relations and friends, come to see them off, and she had not one of her own people to give her a parting word.

Clare proved an excellent sailor. The ship was very comfortable, the weather all that could be wished. Her cabin companion was a delicate girl, the orphan daughter of a country

clergyman. She was going to an aunt at Melbourne, who had offered her a home at her father's death. Nelly Newsam was a gentle, affectionate and timid creature, to whom the voyage was a misery and terror, and Clare found plenty of occupation in attending on and comforting the nervous little girl; and she in return was full of affectionate gratitude, clinging to Clare as to a rock of defence against all danger. It was a very good thing for the latter that she had Nelly as an interest and occupation, taking her out of herself, and preventing her brooding over her own sorrow at parting, as she had done, from all her own people. The William Speirs were a kind middle-aged couple, both *hors de combat* for the first few days, so that Clare saw but little of them till the ship arrived at Gibraltar.

At each port where the ship stopped Clare found a letter from Willie, sent to greet her on her outward way. These were a great joy and comfort to her, and most pleasantly relieved the monotony of the voyage. She was of too reserved a nature to make friends very readily amongst her fellow-passengers; the Speirs and Nelly Newsam were her only intimate companions.

As the voyage drew to a close, Clare could not help a feeling of nervousness, which she seemed powerless to escape from; she fought against it, but still it was there. How should she find Willie? Would there be any change in him since they had parted? She had overheard one of the passengers relate a story of a girl who had gone out to India to be married to a man she had been engaged to for years, that when she landed at Bombay she found he had that morning married some one else; but, after all, she laughed to herself, why should this story frighten her? It was not so *very* long since she had seen Willie; had she not had constant letters from him, each one warmer and more loving than the last? But though she resolutely strove to banish all feelings of nervousness, her agitation was extreme as the "Australasia" steamed slowly into harbour.

Clare could not go on deck, as almost all the other passengers did; she sat in her cabin, with heart beating, wildly, madly. Ah! there was his voice. She opened the door. "Clare." "Willie."

All doubts, fears, tremors were gone as Clare felt Willie's arms around her. Tears of joy filled her eyes and for several minutes she could not speak.

Jack Spiers had come on board to meet his brother. They all went ashore together. Willie had made arrangements, he told Clare, to be married that very day, and they were to start immediately after the ceremony for Fairleigh.

Such haste rather took Clare's breath away, but after all, there was no reason for delay. She felt it would be foolish to object.

Clare noticed that Willie had grown much older-looking in the two years he had been abroad. He was browner, thinner, and had grown a beard. His manner was restless and excited. Every few moments, when speaking to the Speirs, he would turn suddenly and place his hand on Clare's hand, or arm, or shoulder, as though to assure himself she was really there.

The quiet, almost private, ceremony was over. Willie and Clare were man and wife. A hasty lunch, so unlike the conventional wedding breakfast, followed. The carriage that was to convey them up-country was at the door.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Græme." Clara started for a moment at the new name, then looked up at Jack Speirs' kind face with a shy smile. "Make Willie take it easy for a bit," he added. "He has been working very hard lately, rather overdoing himself; a few weeks of happy idleness will do him a world of good."

They said good-bye to the Speirs and Nelly Newsam, who had begged to be "bridesmaid" before going to her aunt. The carriage drove off.

Willie talked incessantly; he appeared more and more excited. It was scarce noon when they had left Melbourne. They had driven for hours. A feeling of alarm crept over Clare, which grew stronger as Willie's excitement increased. His talk began to lose coherence; his hand which held Clare's was feverishly hot. He urged the driver continually to greater speed. They changed horses once on the way, and Clare had some tea at the wayside inn, but Willie refused to eat or drink. He walked up and down, and when the fresh horses were ready, seized Clare almost roughly and hurried her into the carriage. Poor girl! At each moment her terror increased. She feared she knew not what. From time to time he embraced her passionately, and a climax to her terror arrived when after doing so he burst into wild screams of laughter. She tried to soothe him, to make him talk quietly. It was no use.

At length he called to the driver to stop; without one word to



Clare, he leaped from the carriage and hurried away. Some time she waited, anxiously expecting each moment to see him return, when suddenly a pistol shot rang through the still evening air. Clare, pale and almost fainting with terror, yet managed to get out of the carriage, and with heart wildly beating and trembling limbs, hastened in the direction from which the shot came. What a sight met her eyes! There lay her new-made husband, dying or dead, the pistol by his side. "Willie, Willie," she cried as she fell on her knees beside him. "Oh! my darling, my darling, what is this?" Alas, she could not deceive herself; he was dead. She dragged herself painfully to the carriage again. In a voice that was hoarse, though scarce audible, she said to the driver, as she went to the horses' heads, "Bring him."

How the long drive back to Melbourne was accomplished Clare never knew; she remained as one stunned and unconscious. The driver of the carriage returned to the hotel from which Clare had started so few hours ago a happy bride. It was night when they arrived. The Speirs were still there, and the hotel-keeper at once roused the sleeping Jack, whose grief and horror were unbounded. He threw on his clothes and flew down stairs. Clare was still in the carriage, her face deadly pale, her eyes fixed and staring, her hands, which twitched nervously, clasped tightly together, the dead body of her husband stretched beside her, a shawl over him, which covered the face and hid the terrible wound in the forehead where the bullet had entered. Mechanically Jack helped Clare to alight, then led her to his sister-in-law's room. Mrs. Speirs met them in an agony of shocked surprise; Clare's calmness terrified her. She looked as though she had been turned to stone, no tears had come to relieve her agony; if the strain continued her mind must give way.

Clare maintained her stony, unnatural calm till Willie's funeral was over, and then she lay for many weeks unconscious, hovering between life and death, but her splendid constitution at length conquered, and she rose once more from her bed, a broken-hearted woman. Her beautiful hair had all been shaved off when the brain fever was at its height, and when it grew again it was snow-white.

The Speirs had stayed with her during her illness, Mrs. Speirs and Nelly Newsam nursing her devotedly. They had telegraphed to Riversmead, and a few days after Clare left her bed

for the first time, Mrs. Dormer arrived to take her widowed daughter home. The meeting between mother and daughter was heartrending. Clare's tears flowed freely now.

From Jack Speirs, Mrs. Dormer heard how poor Willie had overworked himself. He had been advised and urged to take rest, but would not. His excitement and agitation as the time for Clare's arrival approached had been tremendous, and under the combined strain of this and of hard work, there could be no doubt the brain had given way, and he had committed the fatal deed in a moment of insanity. They never dared ask Clare for any particulars of the drive up country; the driver had told Jack all he knew.

Clare returned to England with her mother, but she could not go to Riversmead. She entered one of the London hospitals, serving her time first as a probationer, and staying on as nurse. All joy had fled from her life, but she found a quiet happiness in ministering to those who were ill and suffering. "Nurse Clare" was pronounced by all the doctors to be the best and most valuable of their assistants. Her quiet, self-controlled manner seemed to soothe the most restless and impatient of those she nursed. She was so gentle, so patient, so cool when these qualities were most needed.

She cherished Willie's memory as something too sacred to be spoken of; all his faults, follies and shortcomings were wiped out and forgotten, and only his loveliness, his beauty and his constant love for her remembered, and for his dear sake she held out a helping hand to many a young man whose weakness needed such help to keep him from falling into the faults and follies which had wrecked Willie Græme's life.

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## **This Transitory Life.**

By THOROLD DICKSON and M. PECHELL.

### **CHAPTER I.**

"I see thee quake ; come let us home repair,  
Come hide thee in mine arms,  
If not for love, then to shun greater harms."

*Drummond of Hawthornden.*

PICCADILLY between eleven and twelve at night early in November. A north-easter is whistling down the street, it is freezing hard, and the thermometer is falling fast. The English winter has come in with one of those sudden rushes, which kill in their outset the weak and the old and the unsuspecting by scores. They are like the spasmodic fits of extreme virtue and exact morality, that at intervals agitate society. They come and go like the whirlwind none knows whence or whither. When they are gone we count the dead and wounded.

Within the last week the weather has been as bright and soft as the heart of man could desire, and the Honourable Douglas Straight, who owned to many weaknesses, but not to that of enthusiasm, had admitted to an intimate friend, and in confidence, "That if it were always like this during eleven months out of the twelve, England would be quite a decent place to live in, it would indeed."

He was now making his way along Piccadilly, cursing, under his breath, the climate of his country and the social conventions which compel men to face it in evening dress, patent leather shoes and silk socks. He had been dining in St. James' Square, and was inhospitably wishing the square and all that dwell therein at the bottom of the sea. It had fallen to his lot to take in to dinner a lady of a large and philanthropic zeal, which ranged from the unemployed at Whitechapel to the loafers of Canton.

"Had Mr. Straight heard whether the Government were going to build another prison, to give work to the unemployed?"

"Outside the walls, or inside?"

The rejoinder was disregarded.

"And really they must know at the Foreign Office, where they know everything, what action would be taken to revenge the outrage on the missionaries at Woosung?"

The girl on his other side was American, amusing and unconventional, and kept most of her conversation for a young baronet in the Guards. In other words Douglas Straight was at the present moment profoundly bored. As he made his way towards his rooms in the Albany, he suddenly stopped and gave a low whistle of surprise. On the opposite side of the way, a young girl, evidently on her way from the theatre, was hastening along in an agitated "hither and thither" course, that betokened fear and mental distress. It was late and she was alone. A rough, coarse-complexioned man accosted her. She started violently and went off with redoubled haste across the street. Narrowly escaping a passing hansom, she tripped by treading on her dress as she reached the pavement, and fell forward almost into Straight's arms.

"I think," said he very slowly, and holding her hands for a moment, "that you had better let me see you safely home."

The few moments sufficed to bring the girl to her senses; she recognized that the man before her was a gentleman, and then the reaction set in; she had been much distressed and not a little frightened. She was now safe. She accordingly sought relief in tears, which was natural enough, but embarrassing for Straight. For a Foreign Office *attaché* to be seen succouring a distressed damsel at midnight in Piccadilly was a situation not to be tolerated for a moment. He called a hansom, placed his unknown charge in it and jumped in himself.

"Addlebury Road, West Kensington."

Straight repeated the semi-hysterical command to the driver and then reviewed the situation. The humour of it was what struck him most. Under their drooping lids his eyes twinkled maliciously, and as his lips twitched into a sardonic smile, Straight covered the situation with a light puff from his cigarette.

"You don't mind my smoking this out, or shall I throw it away?"—but the lady showing fresh symptoms of hysterical weeping, her guide and mentor changed his tone. "Come, come, this won't do. You will make yourself ill if you go on like that. The theatre has been too much for you. What have you been to see?"

' 'A Dire Revenge' at the Corsican."

"Ah! I thought so. Melodrama is to be avoided. Bad for the nerves, so are cigarettes; but then they are pleasant, melodrama isn't."

His companion laughed and rejoined:

"I daresay you are right. It has made me behave like a great goose. At least I got separated from Mrs. Cartright and Janet by the crush in the Haymarket and they crossed without me, and I lost them altogether, and then I did not know what to do."

"So it would appear," remarked Straight quietly.

"You are laughing at me. But you have been very kind, and I am sure mother will wish to thank you when we get home. My name is Lorrimer, we live very quietly, and we do not often go out anywhere."

"And do not know what our delightful climate can do on a night like this. You are shivering all over." And half rising Straight skilfully divested himself of his fur coat and threw it over Miss Lorrimer. He would hear of no protests. The glass was let down to keep out the biting air, and he leaned back in his corner of the cab. The girl was leaning slightly forward. Yes, she was *very* pretty, there was no denying it. Under the loose, white wrapper round her head some fair hair strayed out about a low straight brow, and the delicate outline of her face stood out in soft relief against the cold clear sky. *Very petite, very mignonne*, a fresher flower than Straight had often seen in his own world: "*Dans le monde où l'on s'ennuie*," he thought.

"We shall soon be home now, we have just passed Olympia."

"Perhaps it is as well," Straight muttered under his breath; "the cold seems to be affecting my senses."

"They call it West Kensington," the girl added simply, "but it is really Hammersmith. Here we are."

The cab pulled up among some fifty little semi-detached villas, standing primly in a row with the latest improvements, and Swiss cottage-like discomforts written all over them.

No, Straight would not come in. It was late. Yes, perhaps he was rather cold, but only another reason for hurrying home.

"Perhaps you will give my card to Mrs. Lorrimer. I shall hope to call and inquire after you in a day or two. I hope you have not caught a chill? Good-night."

As the cab wheeled round he caught sight of a slim girlish

figure disappearing in the enfolding embrace of a stout, matronly person, breathless with agitated affection.

"A nice story to get about against me at Brooks's," thought Straight.

Next morning at the office the first man he ran against was Cathcart, a genial young Irishman, whose attitude towards life was that of a participator in a huge joke and comedy provided free of charge by a distant Providence, whose further kindly intentions he contentedly took for granted.

"Ah, Straight, my dear boy, and I'm glad to be the first to tell you the news. I am, indeed. You have got your wish: third secretary at Rome; to leave at once. Italy's a great country, and I almost wish I were coming with you; though London is not altogether devoid of attractions, by no means."

"Thanks, old chap," replied Straight slowly, then, half to himself, "I suppose it was bound to come sooner or later."

"What's the matter with Straight?" burst out the indignant Cathcart a little later to his friend Grigsby. "There's no pleasing him. He's given Rome, which he's been dying for, and when I tell him he just drawls out, 'Thanks, old chap,' as though I'd offered him one of those infernal cigarettes he is for ever smoking."

"Cherchez la femme," quoth the sapient and laconic Grigsby.

That afternoon Straight called at Addlebury Road. "I said I would," he explained to himself.

Mrs. Lorrimer received him with embarrassing warmth and gratitude for his services to her daughter, which Alice herself came in in time to supplement. She had been out walking, and in the lithe figure and elastic step and bright fresh face Straight hardly recognized the timid, shrinking girl of the night before. They gave him tea and made much of him, while Mrs. Lorrimer discoursed at length of their old home at Croydon, of her husband's failure in business, and their subsequent removal to their present tiny dwelling. "He didn't stand it long," she added. "He kept fretting about it, and said he had ruined us, and now I have only got Alice." And Mrs. Lorrimer beamed across at her daughter, who blushed faintly in response.

Soon afterwards Straight left. "Now that's over," he thought to himself.

A week later he remembered he had kept his approaching



departure for Rome to himself, and as he was calling at Holland Park Road he decided to do the civil thing by Mrs. Lorrimer, and look in there also to say good-bye.

Alice was singing as he came in; a fresh, sweet voice if not highly trained, he thought, and on a good-natured impulse he suggested taking three tickets for the next Saturday concert at St. James's Hall. Alice hesitatingly accepted.

Before the day arrived Straight had to look things in the face, this girl was never out of his thoughts. He knew what that meant. The idea was absurd. He half regretted the invitation to the concert, but only half regretted, and when the day came, and Mrs. Lorrimer's asthma kept her a prisoner to the house, and he and Alice sat together, he did not regret it at all.

He watched her eyes grow brighter and her colour come and go with pleasure at the flood of harmony that filled the hall, and Douglas Straight thought, manlike, that the girl just then sitting by his side was the sweetest, fairest, and most desirable of all fair things under the sun.

On the way home he asked her to become his wife, and she consented.

Mrs. Lorrimer cried and laughed alternately, and declared it was the happiest day in her life, which indeed it was.

"You are of age, and can please yourself," was Lord Harborough's curt acknowledgment of the news.

## CHAPTER II.

"A time to dance."

"I MUST congratulate you. How beautiful your wife is. She will be the *belle* of the season. There are absolutely no pretty girls here this winter, English or American."

"Thank you. Yes, my wife is considered pretty, but her people have lived very quietly, and she is unaccustomed to much society."

"Indeed," and Mrs. Zante Browne raised her glasses and gave a prolonged stare across the room to where Alice was seated, listening to the conversation of a tall young man.

"Fond of dancing, I suppose," she added as the band struck up a valse, and the girl, with a hasty glance in her husband's direction, placed her hand upon her partner's arm.

"Oh, yes—that is—at least I suppose so," muttered Straight, following his wife with his eyes. "What on earth has induced her to try to waltz?" was his unspoken comment. "She might at least have waited for some other occasion instead of making a spectacle of herself with all Rome looking on."

All Rome, to Straight's mind, being the congregation of English and Italians then present in the ball-room of the British Embassy, there assembled to "Have the honour to meet their Majesties, King Umberto and Queen Margherita."

That dancing was not Alice's *forte* soon became apparent to the spectators, for she swayed and jerked about in a hopeless manner, treading on her partner's toes, getting entangled in her train, and finally slipping and landing breathless and dishevelled in the lap of a portly Italian dowager.

"We have not arrived at the latest steps here, evidently," remarked Mrs. Zante Browne with a child-like smile, "though Sir Eustace Farquhar is our best dancer."

Douglas bit his lip, for Mrs. Zante Browne had the sharpest tongue in Rome, and had not forgiven him for not having married her niece the season before.

"Come and have some refreshment, won't you?" he said hastily; "or have you seen Lord Belville's new picture? No? Then you really must; it is in the side room off the corridor. You can always tell which are his own by the lamps hanging in front of them."

With a sudden and unwonted fit of good-humour, Mrs. Zante Browne allowed herself to be led away; and in discoursing upon the ambassador's artistic achievements, Straight felt his wounded spirit somewhat comforted, for he was nothing if not sensitive to ridicule.

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"What induced you to make such a spectacle of yourself?" inquired Straight, when he and his wife had returned to their apartment in the Via Condotti. "Your first appearance, too, and every one looking on. If you were going to dance you might at least have taken lessons first."

"I'm very sorry," replied Alice penitently. "I did not mean to, but the music was so good and Sir Eustace said he was sure I could dance, so I thought I would just try, but I won't do it again."

But Douglas was not to be mollified all at once, and continued :

"And then your dress, too—I heard some one say it ought to have been white. Women ought to know what is the correct thing on these occasions."

"But you know you always said you liked me in pink. I put it on to please you, Douglas."

"Well, of course, my dear girl, you don't know what's what yet ; but for goodness sake get some woman to put you up to the wrinkles. Mrs. Zante Browne, for instance ; she always knows what's the correct thing."

"That horrid old woman with the white hair you introduced me to, who stares so rudely through her glasses ?"

"Yes, but she is a power here, and if you take her advice she'll show you what's good form. You must get used to society, you know. In diplomacy so much depends on a fellow's wife."

"I'm afraid you've chosen a wrong sort of girl, then. You ought to have married some one more like your sister, for instance. She has such a manner, and doesn't mind going into a room or anywhere else by herself. I feel so awkward and never know what to say."

"Oh, my sister's well enough. Of course she has been used to that sort of thing all her life. And the other people you will meet when we stay at Harborough House are just like that, and then——"

Here Straight broke off, for he remembered the plainly expressed ideas of his people on his marriage, and wondered when they would relent so far as to invite his wife to the family place. His sister indeed had come to see Alice on her way through London, a visit prompted more by curiosity than kindly feeling, and had expressed her opinion of her sister-in-law in her usual outspoken way.

"You've married a doll, Douglas, an uncommon pretty one, I admit, but I should say she hadn't got two ideas in her head. But give her a bit of social education and I should say she would pass."

It is the privilege of one's relations to say disagreeable things. That is their *raison d'être*.

"You see," continued Alice after a pause, during which time Straight had helped himself to a B. and S., "all the time we lived in London, ever since I was ten years old, we knew

nobody and never visited anywhere. The clergyman called, and so did the doctor, and once I was invited to a dance, but mother would not let me go; and that evening you met me in Piccadilly was the first time I had been to a theatre. The doctor and his wife took me with a party, and I am so glad I persuaded mother to let me go. But for that I should never have met you."

"But surely you must have seen somebody during all those years? You must have relations of some sort. It is an infliction few of us escape."

"Oh yes, they came sometimes; at least when Jack was there."

"Jack! who was Jack?" inquired Straight suspiciously. "You've never mentioned him before."

"Jack is my brother."

"Why, you never told me you had a brother living! I thought all your brothers and sisters were dead!"

Alice muttered something confusedly, and then said with an apparent effort:

"Yes, I have a brother, though I never told you. He is in — America now."

"Well, I must say it is the most extraordinary thing. Here we have been married a whole month and I never knew that you had a brother. What does he do?"

"I—that is, I don't know—farming, most likely," and Alice busied herself over the buttons of her long gloves.

Douglas felt hurt. Had he not a right to be so? Here was his newly-wedded wife first covering him with ridicule, by making a deplorable fiasco on her *début* in Roman society, and secondly wilfully concealing from him the existence of a brother.

"Well," he said, "I daresay I shall learn a good deal about your relations before long, but whoever they were or whatever they did, it can't be helped now. But, anyway, I hope you will remember you have married into a different sort of life altogether, and have your place to take in society. If there's one thing more than another I detest it is a social blunder."

"I hate society. We were so happy before we came here, and had no one to think about but ourselves."

"Little goose! A honeymoon can't last for ever. It would very soon develop into a treacle-moon if it did, and—what's the matter?"

A pretty woman in tears is a sight that generally touches a man's heart, at least if he has not been hardened by matrimony. So the lecture came to an abrupt end.

## CHAPTER III.

"Why do you look so strange upon your wife?"

*Alf's Well that Ends Well.*

WE English are not an adaptive race ; with few exceptions we remain in the grooves in which we were brought up. The French and Americans are different. The Western heiress is transplanted from "Poppa's" sausage factory or log cabin to London drawing-rooms and Paris *salons*, and takes to luxury as to the manner born. She wears the loveliest creations of Worth, who but a few months before made her own dresses, and eats dinners prepared by *chefs*, where lately she herself had cooked the mid-day meal. Place a French shop girl among the *elite* of society, and in an hour's time you would not know that she had not mixed in that society all her life.

Alice was specially unadaptive. She was shy and self-conscious, which led to many social blunders and gave her an air of *gaucherie* which even her beauty could hardly carry off. Transplanted to a new world she failed to take root therein. She disliked it, and the inhabitants thereof. Their ways were not as her ways, nor hers as theirs. For Douglas's sake she tried to overcome her shyness, and endured martyrdoms to which those of St. Cecilia were mild indeed. But to no purpose, and at last she gradually gave up society, declining nearly every invitation and leaving her husband to take his amusements alone. The days became unutterably long and dreary. All day long Straight was at the Embassy, and every evening he had engagements to dinners, balls, &c. For he was a popular fellow, and many ladies in the official world pitied him.

"Such a nice fellow, but married to a stupid little nobody, quite thrown himself away, and he will be Lord Harborough too ; his brother is not expected to live much longer."

Alice took to exploring Rome. Day by day she wandered about among the ruins, guide book in hand, and traced out the sites celebrated in Roman history, wondering as she did so if it would not have been better to have lived in those days, and if

the world was not a much easier place for women then than it is now.

Returning from one of these expeditions one day, she saw a spectre. Not a sensible, well-regulated ghost that can be classified and enrolled in the Psychical Society's reports, but a vague, shadowy something that went before her, coming between her and the sunlight: in the far distance at first, but always coming nearer, and when she shut her eyes it was still there.

There is a terror about the unknowable. When we know exactly what is before us we summon up courage to the fray, but the unknown horror paralyzes our nerves and freezes our blood, and turns the bravest into the veriest coward.

Terrified and unable to escape the spectre's presence Alice grew weak and ill; she lost her appetite, and as she grew weaker the spectre grew stronger and more lifelike. Though when Douglas was with her it paled and retired to a distance.

One day after she had returned, tired and hungry, from a long afternoon in the Forum, the spectre came and stood by her chair and spoke:

"You do not know me, though many of your relations do. Some day I shall have the pleasure of introducing myself."

Alice covered her ears and gave a cry.

"What on earth is the matter?"

And Straight, who had come in during the ghost's speech, came and stood beside his wife.

"I—I don't know; but I got frightened. You are always away now and it is so lonely."

"Sorry, my dear; but official duties are imperative. Why do you mope in here by yourself? Why don't you go and pay calls and drive about with the other women? I heard Mrs. Zante Browne say the other night that she often wanted to take you with her, but you always refused her invitations."

"I don't want to pay calls or go drives with other people. I want you, Douglas. Couldn't you spare me a little time some days?"

"You are hipped and run down, that's what it is; you want a tonic or something of the sort. Do you know you're quite losing your looks too."

"But you love me, Douglas, quite as much as you did at first?"



And, in spite of what he had just said about her appearance, she did look very pretty, with her eyes raised pleadingly to his.

"Love you ; of course I do," he replied, kissing her ; "and I don't want to see you moped and seedy."

"Then stay with me this evening ; we will dine together and go to the theatre afterwards ; that will be like old times."

Douglas bit his moustaches.

"Why didn't you say you wanted to go before ? I've got an engagement I can't get out of : to dine at the Countess d'Avanzi's and go to the opera with them afterwards. By Jove ! it's time I was dressed, too ; it's nearly seven o'clock. Where's that villain Pietro ?" And sharply ringing the bell, he hurried out.

Returning twenty minutes later, in evening dress, he kissed his wife with more warmth than usual. Possibly his conscience pricked him just a little. He had been at the countess's very often lately. She was a quick-witted, sharp-tongued American, who some months before had purchased a title, with a dissipated poverty-stricken Italian attached ; and Douglas forgot her plainness in her brilliant conversation.

"Keep up your spirits. Here's Guy de Maupassant's latest to amuse yourself with, and on no account wait up for me," and he was off.

French novels had no charm for Alice, and after wading drearily through the first chapter she gave it up, and the spectre, who during Straight's presence had retired behind the window curtain, came out and spent the evening on the hearth-rug.

The next morning was a glorious day, and Alice started for a long ramble in the Campagna. Though only February, the sun shone as on a July day in England. The clear air, the deep blue sky, and the green undulating hills all seemed to say, "It is good to be alive." Alice felt it so at all events, and a load seemed lifted from her mind, for the spectre had stayed at home. She walked on and on, now and then stopping to explore some ruin, or turning to gaze at the dome of St. Peter's, now far behind her.

At mid-day she sat down to eat some sandwiches, and afterwards continued her journey. Picking her way amongst some ruins she dislodged a stone, which fell with a crash several feet below her. Now a large sheep-dog was taking a *siesta* in the shade of the ruins when the stone fell, hitting him on the head

and annoying him very much. He arose, uttered a defiant howl, and went for the enemy.

Alice took to her heels; she had several yards' start, and kept ahead for a short time. The race was exciting, but long odds on the dog, and in a few minutes he caught her up and was proceeding to test the quality of her dress when a shower of blows made him drop his prey and retreat, howling, to a distance.

"I'm awfully glad I came up when I did," said the new-comer. "That brute would have bitten you badly." And Alice, as soon as she could collect her scattered senses sufficiently, recognized the cheerful face and boyish figure of Harry Vernon, youngest attaché at the Embassy.

"But really, Mrs. Straight," he continued, "you are doing a most risky thing. It's awfully unsafe for a lady to walk outside the walls alone. There are plenty of ruffians loafing about who would not hesitate to rob you. I always carry a good thick stick myself." 4

"Yes, I suppose it is unsafe; but I feel so tired of being in the town always, and the air is lovely out here."

"Why don't you get your husband to go with you? A long walk or two would do him good."

"He can never get away from the Embassy till quite late."

Vernon gave a low whistle—he had met Straight two or three times lately, driving with the Countess d'Avanzi quite early in the afternoon.

"Well, Mrs. Straight, when you are well enough I will see you home. I'm afraid you are dreadfully shaken."

"I'm all right now," said Alice, rising; but she tottered as she spoke, and had to lean on Vernon's arm for support. Slowly they progressed, and after many halts reached the Porta Pia, where a carriage was hailed.

Straight was at home when they reached the house, and after hearing of his wife's adventure, agreed with Vernon that she had been guilty of a very rash proceeding.

"If I'd known you were so keen on country walks," he said, "I'd try to get off duty earlier and go with you."

"If Mrs. Straight ever wants an escort," chimed in Vernon, "I shall be delighted if she will let me go with her. I'm awfully fond of the country, don't you know," he continued, "and on days when there is no hunting a walk in the Campagna is just the thing I like."

So it came to pass that Alice and Vernon did the country and ruins together, and that youth often dropped in casually for afternoon tea in the Via Condotti.

"Mrs. Straight is an awfully nice little woman," confided Vernon to his great ally, Miss Trefusa P. Watts, of Chicago, as they were waiting for the fox to break cover next morning. "She's a bit shy at first, but when you get to know her there's a lot in her."

"Dare say. Not my style though. Hasn't got a word to say for herself," replied that damsel, who, in common with the other ladies, did not find Alice interesting. "There he is at last. Shall I give you a lead?"

\* \* \* \* \*

A few weeks after these events Straight, returning earlier than usual, went into the *salon* of their flat and called to his wife:

"Come, Alice; we shall just have time for a drive before going to dine with Mrs. Zante Browne. Hurry up and get your things on."

No answer, and he was just turning to leave the room when he caught sight of a figure bundled up in a shapeless mass on the sofa.

"What on earth is the matter with you; are you ill?"

A stifled groan was the only reply.

"Got a headache?" he asked, taking her hand.

"Yes, I can't come out."

"Not come out! What shall I get you? You must get well by this evening."

"I can't go out this evening."

"By Jove! there must be something wrong. I'll send for Dr. Barrett."

"No, no, not on any account. Please don't. It is really nothing; I shall get all right if I'm left alone. My head *is* bad."

"Well, you ought to have advice of some sort. You had a bad headache only yesterday. Much better see a doctor."

But Alice refused to take anything or to move from her position on the sofa, and after drenching her head with eau-de-Cologne, Douglas was fain to leave her and proceed to the dinner party alone.

After he had gone Alice, covering her face with her hands, sobbed long and bitterly, for the spectre had introduced himself to her that afternoon.

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

At the dinner Straight was much taken with his *vis-à-vis*, a lean man apparently about forty; his face burned by tropical suns, and deeply furrowed; his eyes, deep-set and keen as a hawk's, seemed to look things through and through.

He did not speak much or take any interest in the conversation going on around him, but Straight felt that this man was watching him; those far-seeing eyes seemed to be looking into the innermost recesses of his mind, yet whenever he looked up the man appeared to be absorbed in his dinner.

Mrs. Zante Browne was an inveterate lion hunter, and Straight suspected that this man was some new celebrity. When he joined the ladies, he inquired the stranger's name of his hostess's niece.

"The man with the peculiar eyes, who sat opposite you? That is Mr. Moncrieff; he is something or other in India, and has just supplied Government with some valuable information. He has written a great deal about the East and its inhabitants, and is supposed to be one of the best Oriental scholars in the world."

"He *has* peculiar eyes, certainly," said Straight. "Looks as if he could hypnotize or something of that sort."

"Yes, I believe he goes in for all sorts of occult science."

"But I don't see him here," said Straight, looking round the room.

"No," replied his companion, laughing "He never comes into ladies' society when he can help it. Among other qualities he is an ardent woman-hater."

## CHAPTER IV.

"A man after his own heart."

"Is it bad news?" asked Alice.

Straight had dropped the telegram he had been reading and exclaimed, "Poor fellow!"

"Yes, my brother is very ill, dying, probably; all alone in India too. I must go to him at once."

"To India!"

"Yes, it's nothing of a journey now, fourteen days from Brindisi. Just a chance I *may* find him alive. Poor old Vincent! We were always chums. Anyway I should have to go to collect his things and see everything settled up out there. I'll go and apply for leave at once."

"Douglas," said Alice, coming up and laying her hands on his arm, "let me come too; don't leave me here alone."

"Oh, impossible. You'd have to get a lot of things for the voyage, and I must start to-night to catch the mail at Brindisi. Besides you have been so seedy lately, and it's getting hot out there now."

"But I can't stay here alone, it's so miserable. I don't mind the heat, and the voyage will do me good."

"Really you can't come. Travelling in such a hurry I shall have to rough it a good deal. I must reach Poona as soon as possible, you would only get knocked up by the way, and I could not leave you alone anywhere. If you are dull here, why don't you go home? Dr. and Mrs. Barrett are going to England next week; I'll make arrangements for you to travel with them if you like."

"No, I don't want to go home without you. If you won't let me come with you, I will stay here."

Alice, as her husband said, had certainly not been well lately, and her headaches were of frequent occurrence. She had lost all her colour, and her eyes had assumed a dull, leaden hue, yet she steadfastly refused to see any doctor.

Straight, however, remained firm in his refusal to allow her to accompany him to India, and his leave being granted, that evening found him ensconced in the corner of a first-class carriage in the Brindisi express.

• • • • •  
Leaning over the side of the P. and O. steamer Straight watched the town, harbour and lighthouse of Brindisi disappear in the distance. All around him hurry and bustle, passengers inquiring for their luggage, ships' officers greatly harassed, hurrying to and fro, Lascars heaving ropes and chattering all together, as is their wont, and the great sacks of mails bearing home news to the Indian Empire being lowered to their resting place.

Douglas heeded none of these things, he was thinking out his position. His eldest brother was dying, might even then be dead. Poor fellow! he would willingly have granted him a few more years of life, but it was ordained. Well, he would be Lord Harborough, that was all right; he would still continue his profession; but his wife—aye, there was the rub. Why had he been fool enough to marry in such desperate haste? He still was fond of Alice, but she hampered him in his career; she was like a fish out of water, and did not seem to improve. He had made a fatal mistake. Well, he was not the first man, by a long way, who had ruined his career for the sake of a girl's pretty face (that was the way he put it). Beauty was indeed a snare and a delusion, and Alice had certainly lost a great deal of her good looks since marriage. Here his conscience pricked him just a little: had he not neglected her somewhat? but then she did not understand him, and how can a man be companionable to his wife when he is not understood?

"I beg your pardon," said a voice interrupting his meditations, "but I think we have met before."

Straight turned round and saw his late *vis-à-vis* at Mrs. Zante Browne's dinner.

"Mr. Moncrieff! Very glad to see you," he said heartily, for he was glad to see a familiar face in that crowd of human beings.

"So we are to be companions in misery for the next fortnight. You are going to Bombay?"

"Yes, my brother, poor fellow, is dangerously ill at Poona. I have hardly hopes of finding him alive, still there is just a chance. What part of India do you hail from?"

"Dallapore. Native state, you know. I'm in charge of the Rajah there. Pretty place too, and not a bad climate."

"I heard in Rome you had written a lot about India and the natives, and had given Government some valuable information, and that they had offered you an important appointment."

The political agent blew a cloud of smoke from his cheroot and replied:

"Yes, I have written and spoken much, and had my advice been taken on one or two occasions serious complications might have been avoided. Our whole system of administration in the East is rotten to the core. We send youngsters out from home



to govern people about whom they know nothing. We ought to study the ways and character of the natives ; they are as different from us as black from white, and no amount of learning or civilization will alter them. Can the leopard change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin? We make no attempt to understand them, and with one or two exceptions"—and here he named a celebrated Orientalist and traveller—"A—— is the only man who has thoroughly done so ; and did Government ever listen to his advice?"

"Red-tapeism and general ignorance prevail," remarked Straight, who had one or two grievances of his own.

"Just so. At a dinner in town last week, a leading political lady asked me if Indian affairs would not go on much better now that a native was in the House! There is something distinctly refreshing in the innocence which exists anent all affairs in the East."

"Well, I don't know much about Indian affairs myself," said Douglas, "but I should say India was a beastly hole to live in."

"Every man according to his taste," replied Moncrieff. "Most men abuse India when they are living there, but when once they have retired lament it ever after. I like it, though ; there is a charm about the East for me. For people who see below the surface there is a lot to learn. To those who only know Anglo-India, who associate with the people only in courts of justice, *durbars* and such like, there is little to be seen. For those who wear blue glasses all the world is blue. I have lived with the people and as the people. I have gone disguised to places where no white man has ever set foot. I have seen things—but, pardon me, I have a bad habit of moralizing, it comes from living alone. Try one of these cheroots—Oh, there is the dinner bell."

The more Straight saw of the political agent the more he felt attracted to him ; there was a fascination about him he could not describe. Yet now and again he felt a strange repulsion, though it lasted only a moment.

So it came to pass that these two might always be found pacing the deck or sitting smoking together, and joined not at all in the various amusements that obtained among the other passengers.

The fourth day of their voyage was Sunday, and a colonial

bishop who was on board, having recovered from his sea-sickness announced his intention of preaching at the morning service a sermon in aid of the "Society for the Suppression of Betel-nut chewing among the Malays."

Somewhat to Straight's surprise he saw his friend in a chair in the front row.

"You did not expect to see me amongst our worthy friend's audience," remarked the political agent, when the service was over and the passengers had duly handed in their contributions, "but it always interests me to hear other people's views of our common end."

"I don't see much interest in it," replied Douglas. "We live, we grow old, we die. *Voilà tout*, and life is quite enough of a bore as it is without sermons to make it more so. And then things always have a habit of turning out the wrong way."

"Exactly so; but then you have never lived among the Easterns or studied their knowledge. You get disgusted with circumstances, forgetting that you yourself make circumstances, not circumstances you. To every man it is given to attain his desires, and if he fails he has himself to thank."

"There seems to be a remarkable lot of failures knocking about, then."

"True. People allow trivialities, sentiments, or other men's interests to get in their way. They often lose sight of their object altogether, then when they are old they spend their declining years in bewailing what might have been. By the way, did you observe that our friend the bishop is, though probably he does not admit it, a fatalist? 'Be good, and contented with what you have, so you will obtain heaven,' was the gist of his discourse."

"People's general idea of heaven," said Douglas, "is a place for oneself and one's friends. The rest, and those who have in any way offended us, go elsewhere."

"Exactly so. To every man his own ideas. That man," said Moncrieff, pointing to a Lascar, "hopes after death to live in a seraglio surrounded by black-eyed houri. *My* paradise will be—a place where there are no women."

## CHAPTER V.

"What mighty ills have not been done by woman?"

*The Orphan*, Act iii. Scene 1.

STRAIGHT arrived too late to see his brother. When he reached Poona he found that Vincent had died the day before, and the funeral had just taken place. Collecting his brother's effects and settling the few matters of business required did not take long, and refusing all offers of hospitality he returned to Bombay, intending to start for Europe at once.

He was sitting idly in the verandah at Watson's, listening to the eternal cawing of the crows, which, as Madame Blavatsky tells us, are always drunk, when a letter was brought him. He opened it with some curiosity, as the writing and postmark were unknown to him.

It was from Moncrieff, asking Douglas to pay him a visit before he left India.

Now Straight had quite made up his mind to leave by the next day's mail, and when he read the letter he exclaimed, "Impossible." A two days' journey by rail in India just as the hot season is commencing is not exactly an agreeable undertaking, and Douglas hated discomfort.

He read the letter through again.

"After all," he thought, "why should I hurry back?"

Ordering a peg he drank it slowly, then a sudden inspiration seized him; descending to the hall he dispatched three telegrams. Calling his brother's body-servant, whom he had brought from Poona with him, he said:

"Take all the sahib's things to Grindlay's and return quickly. I am not going to Europe to-morrow." The man salaamed. "Afterwards pack my things; we start for Dallapore to-night."

When, two days later, Straight arrived at the little white-washed station, the terminus of the line, Moncrieff was on the platform to meet him. In his white clothes and pith helmet, he looked leaner and browner than ever, but his keen far-seeing eyes compelled the same feeling of attraction.

The station-master, a yellow, weedy-looking Eurasian, came out of his office and surveyed the new arrival with some curiosity.

"See that Mr. Straight's things are sent up by bullock-cart immediately," said the political agent curtly; then turning to Douglas, "My *tonga* is waiting, and we will start at once; it is a long drive up hill."

Straight was not a keen admirer of scenery, but he could not help being impressed by the beauties that met his eye at every turn of the narrow, winding road, up which the sturdy *tats* toiled, urged on by the white-robed *syces* who walked by their heads. The huge tree-ferns hung over the pathway, brilliant sun-birds chattered to each other and tiny grey squirrels darted to and fro.

At a turn of the path when they had gone about half-a-mile, a large yellow Irish terrier walked out of the jungle and sniffed suspiciously at the new-comer.

"My wife Lilith," said Moncrieff, speaking for the first time since they had left the station; "my friend Straight."

The dog stopped sniffing and, standing on her hind legs, licked Douglas' hands.

After nearly three hours' toil up hill, they came in sight of Dallapore, and, having reached the level, a brisk trot of half-an-hour brought them to the gates of a long rambling bungalow, with a Sepoy sentry on guard.

"Here we are at last," said the political agent, leading the way into the verandah, where iced drinks were awaiting them. "This is my home and I will introduce you to my family." He gave a low whistle, a pair of bright eyes and a sharp little nose appeared from a corner of the roof, and a small mongoose climbed carefully down, and running up Moncrieff's arm took up its position on his shoulder. Another whistle, somewhat longer and shriller, caused Douglas to start up with an exclamation of horror, for a large snake uncoiled itself from a chair just behind him, and sliding noiselessly over the floor coiled itself round its master's arm.

"My eldest son, Moti; he has lived with me for three years. You need not be afraid," continued Moncrieff, seeing Douglas did not resume his seat, "he is perfectly harmless."

But a sudden revulsion of feeling swept over Straight, for, as he looked at the snake's glittering eyes, they seemed to contain a strange likeness to the political agent's

The feeling was only momentary, however, and Douglas sat

down again and even patted Moti's head, though in a general way he loathed snakes.

"To-night we will rest," said Moncrieff, "and to-morrow I hope to be able to show you some sport."

They dined alone, the only other white man in the place being the doctor, and he was away on a week's leave.

The interior of the bungalow was comfortably furnished, and Straight marvelled at the great quantity of books. They appeared to be in all languages, but the greater part in Eastern tongues.

"A curious motto that," remarked Straight when, after a well-served dinner, they were smoking in the verandah, and he pointed to a scroll bearing the words, "Woman is the root of all evil."

The political agent smiled. "There are one or two others about," he said, and Douglas, turning his head, saw a similar scroll, and written thereon, "Never trust a woman."

"Well, I must say there is something in that," remarked Straight feelingly. "They are 'kittle cattle,' and awfully hard to understand." Then, thinking of his marriage, he waxed eloquent. "Yes, and they lead one into all sorts of foolish things too, and turn out utterly different from what one expects. But, if you are married, why, there is an end of it; you have burnt your boats behind you, and there is nothing to do but to grin and bear it."

Silence for a few minutes, broken only by the chirping of the crickets and croaking of the frogs.

Then the political agent laid aside his *kaliun* and spoke.

"I had a wife once," he said; "indeed, for the matter of that I have one now, for I have never heard of her death. You may, perhaps, wonder, in common with many others, why I remain in this out-of-the-way place, when I have been offered so many better appointments, and why I so rarely mix with my countrymen. I will tell you.

"Years ago, I have forgotten how long, I fell into that state of insanity called love. It is an epidemic which most of us take, and the world still waits for a Jenner to invent a vaccine which shall inoculate us against it. She was pretty, I know. We were married, and I don't suppose at that time that the world contained a greater fool than myself. All my energies, my abilities were employed for her. I studied hard from morning

till night, and worked like a slave to give her her heart's desires, horses, jewels, clothes and such trash as women love.

"One evening, I gave an entertainment for her pleasure. After supper, some fellows made a speech ; I had to return thanks. I rose to do so, and to gain an inspiration glanced across the table at my wife. She was looking at me with a smile on her lips, but her hand, loaded with my rings and jewels, lay clasped in that of the man next her.

"I got through my speech, I believe, for the people applauded, and then pleading sudden illness, retired. Even through the long vista of years I still remember what I suffered that night. But I was mad for I was in love. Next morning I saw my wife, who met me as if nothing had happened ; I told her what I had seen, and that she could go to her lover. She cried and prayed and said something about her innocence and my neglect, but I remained firm and she went away with him."

"And you were divorced ?" asked Straight.

"No, I had had enough of matrimony ; I shall never want to marry again."

"But your wife ?"

"She chose her path and had to take the consequences. I pay an allowance quarterly to her bankers, but have never had sufficient curiosity to inquire as to her whereabouts or mode of life. I have almost forgotten her existence."

"What became of the man ?" asked Douglas.

The political agent drew himself up suddenly, his eyes seemed to flash fire, and Moti disturbed in his slumber gave a faint hiss.

"He is buried in the sands near Boulogne. I shot him through the heart."

The next day was devoted to sport, and Straight thought he had never seen so good a shot as Moncrieff, he seemed to hit everything he aimed at, and although game was not plentiful they had made a fairly respectable bag by the end of the day.

"Well," remarked Straight as they sat in the verandah after dinner, "if you are as good at everything else as you are at bringing down birds, I don't wonder at Government wanting your assistance."

"I go upon a simple principle," replied Moncrieff. "If I want



anything, be it a sand-grouse or an appointment, I set to work and never rest until I get it."

"Are you always successful?"

"Always. It may be long in coming, there may be apparently insurmountable difficulties in the way, but in the end I always succeed. Have you ever studied Napoleon's character? I admire it exceedingly; everything gave way before him simply by his power of will."

"He was a genius though," objected Douglas, "and a pretty unscrupulous one at that."

Moncrieff smiled. "Genius, as the copy-books tell us, is the capacity for taking infinite pains. As for scruples, let the man who indulges in them prepare to take a back seat. Do not a large proportion of Christians take for their motto, 'The end justifies the means,' and has not Darwin clearly expounded the doctrine of 'the survival of the fittest?'"

"It's rather a dangerous theory to go upon, isn't it? You might justify almost anything on those grounds. I daresay Napoleon did when he poisoned those prisoners at Acre. You would hardly approve of murder?"

"And why not?"

Douglas started; the same feeling of revulsion came over him again, but it passed instantaneously as Moncrieff fixed his eyes upon him.

"The idea of murder horrifies you! and very properly. In Europe the Decalogue prevails, which, perhaps, is just as well; but in the East things are different, and have been so from time immemorial. Here one cannot be governed by laws which are beneficial in other latitudes. Where do you find an unchanging standard of right and wrong? Is not the very act of murder praised and extolled in your bible?"

"Yes, that is all very well," said Straight; "but in Europe laws prevail, and one is bound by them, and in spite of your theory it is very hard to get on, especially if one makes a false step; you never seem to recover the ground you have lost."

"You are ambitious, then?"

"I don't know about ambitious. Every man, I suppose, has something he hopes to get, and I want to get to the top branch of my particular tree."

"And why not?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I've made a hash of affairs by marrying unsuitably. You see, a clever wife, who has plenty of tact and gets on well with the chiefs, is just the making of a fellow, and *vice-versâ*."

"And you, having failed to find that fabulous animal, a perfect woman, sit down and bemoan your fate. I never allowed a *man* to stand in my way."

"No, I suppose not. But not being a Napoleon I cannot summarily dispose of my Josephine."

"Mahmoud," said the political agent to the servant who entered the room just then with a tray of refreshments, "what have you done with Fatimeh?"

"Sahib, she caused much disquiet. Where she was there was no peace. I therefore returned her to her father's house. It is not good for men to live with such women."

"That foolish fellow," said Moncrieff, "having some spare cash, must needs buy himself a second wife. You have heard with what results. In some things these Orientals are distinctly ahead of us."

Douglas remained at Dallapore for ten days. He found the political agent a most interesting companion, and the nameless attraction grew stronger than ever. Without perceiving it he came gradually to adopt all Moncrieff's ideas and theories, absorbing them as a sponge does water, though had any one suggested that he had not always held those views he would have indignantly denied it.

When at last he took leave of the political agent and started for Bombay, he felt he was leaving one of his oldest friends. Arrived at Bombay, Straight looked in at the hotel on his way to the steamer. She was to sail at three, it was now half-past two; just time for a little welcome rest in the cool of the verandah and a decent lunch before going on board. There was the usual crowd of Anglo-Indians in the thinnest of tweeds and the largest of sun-hats, sitting round small marble-topped tables, smoking and having occasional recourse to the cooling drinks that in endless variety stood before them. The pleasures of imagination, restricted and repressed by exile, take for the Anglo-Indian two principal directions: the weirdness of his solar topee and the compound inscrutability of his drinks.

Through the motley crowd of money-changers, touts, guides

and jewellers that throng the tourist in such places, Straight made his way to one of the few vacant seats, at a table before which an imperturbable box-wallah was spreading out his glittering wares, and unblushingly demanding ten rupees for a white sapphire. His victim was a stout, white-whiskered, weather-beaten man, whose fifty summers had not brought him experience in stones. He acquired the stone, which was worth perhaps fifty cents, and was about to yield to the charms of a gold ring set with blue sapphires and brilliants, as Straight dropped into the chair beside him.

The Eastern jeweller conducts his business on simple principles. If a purchaser knows what he is about, a fair bargain will be driven. If he falls under the native denomination of "D——d fool passenger," fooled he will be to the top of his bent. It is after all but "Caveat emptor" writ large.

"Just picking up a few fal-lals for my wife," announced the stout man.

"Indeed," rejoined Straight with a polite assumption of faint interest.

"Ah, you haven't seen my wife! A fine woman, sir, a fine woman, a re-markable woman. The *belle* of Sydney. Have you seen Sydney Harbour? No. Ah! pleasure to come. Finest harbour in the world. *I* come from Sydney."

Just then the tiffin bell rung, and Straight went into lunch with a confused notion that the stout man was the most remarkable man in the world and owned Sydney Harbour.

## CHAPTER VI.

"For where is any author in the world  
Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?"

*Love's Labour's Lost.*

THE "Ravenna" was twenty-four hours out at sea with a fine free roll on her, exhilarating enough to those that take fresh health from salt water, but eminently hateful to the jaundiced and sick. Mrs. John Trent was sitting on deck half reading and half dozing, enjoying in a dreamy semi-consciousness the swift motion of the ship, the splash and ripple of the water, and the flood of soft light from the setting sun. Mr. J. Primrose Trent was enjoying nothing at all, except, poor man, some intervals of

drowsy sleep. He was of those to whom it comes amiss to "go down to the sea in ships."

At dinner the evening before, Straight, sitting on the captain's left, had recognized across the table his stout friend of Watson's Hotel, and was fain to admit that the refined and graceful woman between him and the captain would be the *belle* of many a London drawing-room, not to speak of Sydney ones.

Introductions followed, and, having swiftly taken stock of the other passengers, Straight was not long in deciding that Mrs. Trent's society, if she would accord it, would amply suffice to lift the voyage above the usual dead level of boredom.

He came up to her now as she sat on deck, and as he did so noticed that the title of her half-closed book was in Italian. He took a seat beside her, and they chatted away of Italy and Italian pictures and sunsets and the bright life to be led in that pleasant land.

"I spent the happiest years of my life there," she said. "During the last five years of my father's life we lived at Florence. Dear, sleepy old place; I seem to see it now. The Duomo and Palazzo Vecchio, the market-place with the flower-girls, and the quaint old bridges over the Arno. It is a place one always remembers vividly, I think. Have you been there?"

"Yes, but only in the passing-tourist kind of way. I managed to put in a couple of days there when I was transferred to Rome. I am not sure that it isn't better to leave places entirely alone if one can't devote plenty of time to them; though some people seem to think that the essence of travelling consists in seeing the largest number of places in the shortest possible time. The outward and visible sign of this mental state is the guide-book. If you were to suggest to this school that it is possible to enjoy a picture or a cathedral without a Baedeker they would laugh you to scorn."

"Yes," said Mrs. Trent, laughing, "we used to notice them at Florence. They always looked anxious and in such a hurry. My father used to laugh and say he wondered why they didn't save their money and read about the places at home, for they would never form an opinion that wasn't in accordance with their books."

"The most advanced specimen of the guide-book and hurry crowd that I ever met was an American I ran up against before

I left India. He boasted that he had seen India in ten days, and no one was so ill advised as to argue with him. He had 'done' India, and there was an end of it. He was taking back with him a model of the Taj Mahal. A Chicago syndicate were going to erect a copy of it 'in red brick and the very best wrought-iron girders, right away.'" Straight imitated the slow, nasal intonation, and added: "The Taj in red brick! If there be any limit to modern vandalism that should about touch it."

"Yes," said Mrs. Trent in her soft, pleasant voice, "one would think so. It reminds one of the first French occupation of Italy, to which, as you know, the Louvre owes not a little. A French officer was standing one day near the Duomo, looking up at Giotto's campanile, when a small Florentine *gamin* asked him with great politeness whether that was the next object that the *signori* would dispatch to Paris. But tell me about Rome. I have never been there. It was the old story, always talking about it, but never going."

As she mentioned Rome, Straight's face clouded over as though with some unpleasant memory.

Just then the dressing-bell sounded.

"I must go and see how my husband is getting on," said Mrs. Trent rising. He followed her with his eyes as she disappeared down the companion, and then turned and watched the last glow of the setting sun slowly die out in the west.

That evening, and many other evenings after dinner, Straight sought out Mrs. Trent. The amateur concerts in the music-room were excellent, he thought, at a distance, and the small talk of the smoking-room had no special attraction. The rest of the passengers were not, indeed, an interesting set, though two of them offered some mild amusement to their fellows. Mr. and Mrs. d'Arcy-Hume were a newly-married couple. They were also third cousins to a peer of the realm. This fact was ever present in their minds. The responsibility it carries with it is, indeed, not to be under-estimated. Mrs. and Mr. d'Arcy-Hume decided on the safest line: they confined their conversation entirely to themselves. He was a callow and harmless youth, some seven years younger than his bride, and when he was not arranging her pillows or bringing her a new novel, he was ordering her a champagne cock-tail with touching solicitude

Mrs. d'Arcy-Hume had, indeed, indicated that she was prepared to make one addition to her limited visiting list; but the Honourable Douglas Straight took a certain malicious pleasure in avoiding the happy pair.

"What a pity it is," he remarked one day to Mrs. Trent, "that that woman drinks so much. Bad enough in a man; but he generally pulls himself together sooner or later. When it gets hold of a woman she simply goes headlong."

"A woman who drinks is one of the saddest sights in the world. We see and hear a good deal about it among men in the colonies, but the women are rarely addicted to it. I'm afraid one can't say the same about those in the old world. The racketty life and constant hurry and high pressure lead to a good deal of secret drinking among those who ought to be above such a vice. But I am only speaking from what I have read, and I think great allowance ought to be made for those who fall under its sway; it is a kind of disease, and the sufferers have more need of the physician than the preacher."

"Why, Mrs. Trent, I believe you are one of those kind souls who regard crime as a mental aberration, curable by restraint and the culture of æstheticism. The Americans, I believe, have some establishments where forgers and housebreakers are educated to a taste for Italian opera and the old masters. The weak point in the system seems to be that the society they have injured have to pay the professors."

"I don't know that I go quite so far as that," she replied, raising her beautiful eyes towards his, "but I think that the best of us are not so good that we don't stand in need of great kindness and forbearance in the judgment of our fellows."

Just then a brisk youth, one of the sports' committee, without which no P. and O. voyage is complete, came up soliciting subscriptions. Straight promptly offered his guinea, "but on the distinct stipulation that he should be excused from taking any violent exercise in this frightful heat."

"They call this a free country, and one has to pay for the privilege of keeping cool," he explained to Mrs. Trent.

Mr. Trent was still confined to his cabin, and in the depressing solitude gave himself up to that somewhat morbid train of thought to which those are liable who have at any time lived much alone. His wife came to see him frequently, but her



departure only threw him back into fresh gloom. She had become indispensable to him. At the same time he felt now, as he had not felt before, that his marriage was not an unqualified success.

Absent from his wife he felt wretched, and in her presence he was not entirely happy. Incompatibility of education and tastes he had been semi-conscious of all the years of his married life. Within the last week something, some unknown quantity, had brought out the skeleton from its cupboard. Like King Hezekiah of old, John Trent groaned and turned his face to the wall. Meanwhile, the "Ravenna" was slipping along through the placid waters, now lying stretched out like some vast inland lake rather than a sea.

"Moonlight on the water always reminds me of Florence, and the Arno shining between the old bridges," said Margaret Trent to Straight, who was standing beside her smoking a cigarette in perfect peace and enjoyment. "We used to live in a pretty villa outside the town, from which you could see the town and the river. Sitting out on one of those mild evenings in June or July, it was very pleasant. Sometimes an Italian friend would play the mandoline and sing to us."

"You play and sing so well yourself, Mrs. Trent, it was rather unkind of you to delight us only once and no more."

"On board ship I dislike it. They rather expect it as a matter of course every night. Besides, I was so very fond of music in the old days, and—there are some things it is better to forget. That was my great ambition," she added after a pause; "I was going to study in Rome: then our home was broken up and my life changed. It is no good brooding over the might-have-beens of life."

"Not a bit," replied Straight, though the moody manner with which he threw away his half-smoked cigarette belied the cheerfulness of his tone. "I suppose in Australia you had little opportunity of developing your talent?"

"My father had little besides his pension. He had lost money through bad advice from a brother-officer. I never heard the details. When he died, my sister and I were left with next to nothing. I went to Australia as a governess; some rich Australians passing through Florence took a fancy to me. That is my story," she added with a little laugh.

"Thank you, Mrs. Trent," said Straight simply. Then they both lapsed into silence.

Next day the "Ravenna" passed under the lee of Socotra. Douglas Straight and Mrs. Trent stood watching it. The red sandstone crags and peaks and serrated summits glowed rich and warm in the sunset. The sea was gently washing its rugged shores, against which stood out one tiny white sail, the only sign of life visible. It was a pretty picture, but to Straight it brought the unpleasant reflection that they would soon be at Aden; the voyage was coming to a close. Conversations with Moncrieff rose to his mind. What a fool he had been. He had wrecked his life for a pretty face; he, with every advantage that birth, station and, for the matter of that, personal comeliness could give, had thrown himself away on the chance acquaintance of a midnight *rencontre*. *That* dream was over. He had married, as most men do, not the real woman, but the golden nimbus of abstract perfection that imagination had woven about her. And now he knew the real woman.

He had married a doll, and he had met his ideal; he was profoundly to be commiserated.

"It is rather an inhospitable island," said his companion presently, "and yet there is something about it as we see it now, that makes one think of the lotus-eaters and the 'so rest ye brother mariners, we will not wander more.'"

"And the land where all things are forgotten," added Straight.

"Couldn't fatten many sheep up there on those hills," said a rough voice behind them.

Turning round they saw Trent, somewhat yellow as to colour and shrunken as to form.

He had been watching them for some minutes with an expression half of pain, half of animosity. Some of his vague, morbid broodings in the cabin began to take more definite shape.

"Good-evening, Mr. Straight; glad to see you again. Just come up for a breath of fresh air. It's pretty clear that Bombay and prawn curries don't agree with me. I shan't be sorry to see what they call 'the blue waters of the Mediterranean,' though how they can be bluer than all the blue water we have seen since Sydney beats me. My wife looks well, but she always does. I told you," he went on with a smile, "that she was a re-

markable woman the first time we met." And in the recollection his vague feeling of mistrust of Straight disappeared.

"She's got a great hankering after Italy, has my wife. Her father, General Buckley, lived there years ago. If I can manage it, I've promised to take Margaret to Florence, but I've got a big bit of business to attend to first in London; and shiners before sentiment has always been my motto. Which reminds me there are a few calculations I want to make before they clear the saloon for dinner," and looking rather worried, John Trent disappeared down the companion.

Margaret Trent's eyes and Straight's met, but they said nothing.

At Aden, a letter was brought to Straight; it was from his wife. She had been very lonely without him and had been ill, and he must expect to see her changed. She was longing to see him and was ever his loving Alice.

The conventional words stung him. She was his wife, he could not get over that fact, and she still loved him. His love for her was dead. That did not make her less his wife. Under his breath he cursed the mad folly, as he now regarded it, that made her so. But he owed her at least gentleness and consideration. Poor pale-faced girl, the phantom of her former self. He need not make her more wretched than she was already.

At Brindisi, Straight said good-bye to the Trents; they were going by sea to Marseilles.

*(To be continued.)*

## Our Irish Fortnight.

By ETHEL F. HEDDLE.

I WAS convinced, before starting, that the success of our Irish fortnight was assured. We were a party of three—the kindest, and wittiest, and best of aunts, Clarinda and myself. Aunt A. is one of those people who not only find good in everything and sermons in stones, but interest in everything, not to say humour; and Clarinda—well, Clarinda's friends all know her favourite occupation is to smooth the stony road, and pick the thorns from the roses, and to be the unselfish, and the tactful, and the good-humoured on all and every occasion. With these two I folded the wings of my spirit. I could afford to be cross, if so inclined, and that is a luxury not permissible always in a travelling party.

Well, we crossed from Greenock, armed by Cook's tickets, and at the very first step found that a mistake had been made somehow—how, we endeavoured vainly to discover. We had only single tickets in some cases and double in other, and the first thing was to sit down and go through said tickets, which included coupons for bed, breakfast and dinner at all the hotels we intended to visit. For ladies travelling alone in Ireland I beg to recommend these coupons. It saves time, and they certainly save money. And tips are included. The rate is, I think, ten shillings per day.

The crossing, though dreaded, was fine; and after a wild search for Cook's office in the rainy drizzle of the early September morning, and a wilder grapple after to understand the scheme of the tickets—"the nice, amiable clerk" in Edinburgh having hopelessly confused Aunt A.—we departed from Belfast for Portrush and the Causeway. Belfast, of course, needs no comment or description. It is so severely useful and prosperous and plain that one might as well grow eloquent over Glasgow. And I do not know if the writer lives who could do that. We reached Portrush about two, and there took the electric car for the

Causeway. The day had brightened into pale and rather cold sunshine, and Portrush was gay and golfing, and the sea, tossing below, had grand waves. We had lunched in the train, and then made a surreptitious cup of tea by means of Clarinda's genius and an extremely useful tea-basket, and we had not spilt the water, nor the cream, nor the methylated spirit, nor more than half of each cup of tea, so were quite refreshed and ready for the Causeway. The drive in the little electric tram was extremely fine. It ambles along by the edge of the road, and below was the sea rolling up in huge green waves, cream-edged. There are fine cliffs and fantastic sea-worn arches and, as we proceeded farther, the picturesque ruin of Dunluce. This castle seems to have gone through all sorts of vicissitudes and changed hands more than once. It was "grabbed" from an Irish M'Quillan by a greedy Scot, MacDonnel, who lost and regained it, and had an extremely stormy tenure of his stolen property, as he well deserved. A legend told in the vicinity is that under the kitchen there was a huge cavern, used for cooking purposes on high days, and that on one occasion, when there was an unusually large feast in progression, the floor of the kitchen gave way, and the entire band of cooks, the provisions and the fire were all precipitated into the cavern below, with disastrous results. And the consequence of this legend, which loves to enforce the moral of its tale, was that Lady Margaret MacDonnel was so alarmed by the incident that she quitted the castle, which fell gradually into ruins. She may, of course, have regarded the accident as poetical justice falling on her race; but I am sure, if she had been a Campbell and not a MacDonnel, she would have much more sensibly removed or rebuilt the kitchen. "The greed of the Campbell" would have been proof against even poetical justice. We reached the Causeway Hotel in a threatening drizzle, but, armed with umbrellas and waterproofs, and after absolutely refusing guides, we set off for Ireland's famous show-place. Scotch opinion, prejudiced of course, vows that its Staffa is far more wonderful than the Irish basaltic rocks; but we need not make comparisons, which are usually futile, and only tend to argument and loss of temper. We said these huge pillars reminded us of an organ factory; the highest pipes are about thirty feet above the level of the shore, and the smallest only one or two. Headlands of rain-drenched green stretched to right and left of us, while dimly in front might

be seen the coast of Scotland, "stern and wild," and lowering to the northward. The waves rose, great walls of green water, through which the little sunshine left flickered feebly, and they dashed their impetuous force over the pillars and far up over the rocks. To watch waves like these was always a curious fascination, and the time passed and the little sunshine fled altogether before we realized that darkness was closing in, and we had not gone beyond the Causeway, and seen neither "Grace Staples' Cave" nor the "Chimney Tops." We are not, however, of that insatiable type of sightseer who regards wet and fatigue with scorn as long as they "see everything," and as it was now a steady downpour, we returned to the hotel, where, after a comfortable *table d'hôte*, Aunt A. read from the guide book all the scientific details we ought to have known, and all the numericals always so dear to the heart of a sightseer of properly-balanced mind.

"About 37,000 pillars—not to speak of those people have carried off—and it says we could have had very curious specimens of 'the paleolithic and neolithic works of stone or flint.' Most admirable and curious! And only a few shillings each. Dear me, how moderate!"

"I saw a lot of rubbishy-looking stones," Clarinda remarked wickedly. "I prefer to keep my shillings for photos and bog-oak. The girls would not thank me for paleolithic curiosities," which was so hopeless a remark to make before a severe and probably geological or mineralogical old gentleman who was examining a fragment of rock by our side, that Aunt A. shook her head and said no more.

Next day we progressed, by train, to Dublin. We looked out for round towers on the way, but saw none, only—and here I quote Aunt A. again—"green, positively arsenically green grass, and potatoes and cabbages planted side by side, in a curiously miscellaneous manner;" and by nightfall we were in the capital. Our fatal tickets had caused wordy warfare again, and I had to grasp them from a sulky guard and count them firmly before his eyes; but we had grown so accustomed to explanation and argument that Aunt A. remarked she was "quite disappointed, it all blew over so easily"—an opinion we did not share. In Dublin, however, a lengthy visit to Messrs. Cook's agents put all right, and armed with the necessary additions, we left the office.



and made our way to the museum. It was comforting to know the mistake had been entirely our own. I do not love museums. If I fall, henceforth, in the reader's opinion, I cannot help it. Neither does Clarinda love them. We spent too many holidays and Saturday afternoons while gay and giddy in the Industrial Museum in Edinburgh, and ate too many fossilized buns there; but I must say Dublin has the finest collection I ever saw. I only wish I could tell a tithe of all we saw, for, as a caretaker told us, almost apologetically, as if he were begging our pardon for being our superior, "You know, ladies, there are more ancient gold ornaments here than in all the other museums in Europe!" These are indeed wonderful. Then we saw the brooch of Tara, and the remains of a corpse which had lain 2,000 years in the bog. From the museum we went to see Trinity College Library and the Book of Kells. It was almost as difficult to get Aunt A. from this as Clarinda, who adores shopping, from the bog-oak shops; but I succeeded in doing both, and after a drive in the beautiful Phoenix Park, where we saw the hideous gash in the pathway which marks the spot of Lord Frederick Cavendish's murder, we wound up by going to "Arrah-na-Pogue" in the evening. It seemed quite the proper thing to do. Next day we visited the Castle and the Castle Chapel, where a guide of fearful and useful learning and solemnity, who gave us a Browning-like description of the symbols in the carving and stained glass, marched us round and pointed everywhere with a long wand. We all felt as if we were at school. "He is fast pulverizing me; I feel as if I were reading 'The Ring and the Book,'" Clarinda wailed. "Let us go away. We would *not* dare give him a *six-pence*! You could more easily tip the Prince of Wales. *Do* come! These people are mesmerized. See that woman's frozen stare!" So we fled. Next day was Sunday, and we went to St. Patrick's, under the delusion that it was a Roman Catholic cathedral. Clarinda has not been abroad, and wished to see one. But Roman Catholic churches and Home Rulers were two things we had a great difficulty in finding. I have no doubt they exist, but an evil fate dogged our footsteps. For one thing, I think car-drivers, whom we chiefly questioned as to their views, are chary about explaining their politics, thinking these may affect their fares; and Aunt A.'s provoked summary of the matter, after an unusually large extortion, was that for her part car-drivers,

porters, guides and beggars would certainly "cure her of Home Rule before she left Ireland." In the evening we tried in vain, again, to find a Roman Catholic place of worship, and wandered into a very fine Episcopal church, and next day we returned to St. Patrick's to examine it more closely. Dean Swift's monument is a plain and dreary black slab ; Stella, poor soul, having hers on the other side of the door. Poor solitary genius ! Poor loving woman ! there seemed a pall of gloom about them even here. The stalls in the choir are very fine, each with its knight's helmet and sword above ; but we had to leave ere long for lunch, and presently, from a crowded station, started for Killarney. In the train there seemed much excitement proceeding from the next carriage, and then we learned that Mr. O'Brien was there, returning to the bosom of his constituents. All the way along the route there was acclamation and now and then a speech. Clarinda hung out of the window, whence she was only driven by a reporter, who took her place ; but we could not hear much, except an excited voice and bawls of delight from the crowd.

The House of Lords was to "swallow" something—I believe he said "the leek," and Clarinda placidly inquired if the aristocracy were fond of onions, as she proceeded to make tea.

How we ever got out at Mallow, which is O'Brien's birth-place, and where fate had ruled we must change, I know not. The crowd surged wildly round the windows, but I drove a peculiarly spiky umbrella in the wraps straight before me, and the others followed in the pathway thus made, deaf to vituperation and "Be aisy there !"

Killarney's lakes and dells were reached that night, and how shall I begin to give you even the faintest idea of their charms ! As I write, a misty picture rises up before me, shifting like a kaleidoscope. I see our first drive through the dirty little town, and past bare-footed women, and men selling shillelaghs, into the lovely country road, where blackberries hung in ebony clusters and lined the way. I see the hills and the lake, and the rowan and the heather and the arbutus—such a wealth of luxuriant growth as was strange to us. I feel the soft kiss of the air. I hear the brogue of our car-driver as he tells us that he does "just what he can, my lady, in the winter ; just what he can." I watch the rosy-faced beggars running after us.

The Gap of Dunloe is a kind of second and wilder Glencoe.

and we rode down it, after stopping for refreshment in the lonely little inn, under the shelter of the Purple Mountain. Then we lunched while being rowed down the lake, and saw Castle Ross, and heard the echoes, and feasted on nature and beauty till all speech left us. The delights of Killarney and Muckcross, and Aghadoe, and the Herbert estate, and the deer forest, and the waterfalls cannot be painted in a brief article. Go and see them for yourself; no description can do them justice, even if this feeble pen could essay that task. We would fain have returned to the Black Valley and climbed even one of the Macgillycuddy Reeks, but our fine days had fled, and we had Glengarriff in view. That, too, is lovely beyond compare, and we stopped at Kenmare and Bantry, where a market was proceeding, and the town was full of soft-voiced women, in their long black cloaks, the nun-like hoods shading those wonderful gray-blue Irish eyes that are like the pure slate colour of the deepest part in one of their own lakes. From Glengarriff, the beautiful, to Cork, chiefly for the sake of Castle Blarney.

"I always longed to have charming manners!" Clarinda said that evening, in the Cork Hotel, as we counted our photos before the fire. "After I have kissed the Blarney Stone, I shall have a mixture of 'that repose which marks the caste of Vere de Vere,' combined with a sweet airy charm and tact which will make me welcomed everywhere."

"Yes, wrestle with the porters and the cab-drivers with your sweet airy charm," I said; but to this Clarinda demurred.

She said that might fling the delicate charm from her manner before we got home. But alas! only an acrobat or a fly can kiss the Blarney Stone now! It is on the outside of the wall on the battlements, and as several tourists have essayed the feat, thereby breaking, one a leg and one an arm, Clarinda sat down in despair and gave up the idea.

"I've only found shamrock once, myself, and only seen three round towers," she wailed. "I thought they abounded everywhere. I can't kiss the Blarney Stone and I've not yet been into an Irish Roman Catholic cathedral! Ireland is a distressful disappointment!"

"Look at the view, and as to-morrow is Sunday and this the centre of Catholicism, we'll try again for the cathedral to-morrow."

Next day Aunt A. came up cheerfully, saying she had seen a fine picture of St. Finn Barr's Cathedral, and *now* Clarinda would be pleased and satisfied. She was fated to be neither.

St. Finn Barr's, too, was Episcopalian! We enjoyed the beautiful service, but, like Toddy, "we wished to see" our especial "wheels go round." At dinner that night we sat next a pleasant-looking man, who glanced up in slight amusement at a speech of Aunt Annie's, as she searched about in the ice pail for a particular lump she wanted.

"Ireland," she announced, "is charming, quite charming; but if there are either Home Rulers or Roman Catholic churches in its breadth and length they hide their light under a bushel. That is all I say."

"We have such a fatal trick of *never* finding a building we are directed to," I suggested. "And we did see O'Brien! and there was that Parnellite on 'sweet Innisfallen' (Oh! *wasn't* it sweet?) who abused Mr. Gladstone! You know you closed the conversation after that."

"His daughter did not know the words of 'The Wearin' o' the Green!'" she retorted. "Fancy a Scotch girl not knowing 'Auld Lang Syne!'"

And then I saw our neighbour's eyes twinkle and, very politely, he offered to lead us that evening to service at the Catholic church; we would be pleased, too, he said, to know that he was a Home Ruler and that the species really did exist. So Clarinda got her desire; we heard an extremely eloquent sermon, and the singing was beautiful. The choir concluded with a sweet old hymn I had heard before, sung by lips that are very dear:

"Mother of Christ, star of the sea,  
Pray for the wanderer, pray for me,"

and outside the church our polite friend was waiting, and saw us back to the hotel.

Next day we returned to Dublin, where Aunt A. desired a final peep at the enchantments of the museum, and thence we made our way to Belfast again.

We left the shores of the Emerald Isle with the deepest regret; we could have lingered in Killarney for weeks. It was late September, but the soft humid air was as balmy as June, and oh! the tangle of ferns, and heather, and bracken on the rocks! The shadows creeping up the mountain, and the desolate gran-

deur of the Black Valley! After all, regretful memory pardons the beggars and the ingratiating scamps on the road, who even charged for helping us over a huge puddle in a hand-cart—which puddle, we shrewdly suspected, was kept full for the purpose—we pardoned everything; there was so much for which to be grateful.

And we have put away as our own for ever certain cherished and beautiful memory pictures. Ruined Muckcross Abbey, where the green fronds of the harts'-tongue crept everywhere, and peeped through the cracks in the tombs. Aghadoe, solitary above the placid blue of the lake: the sad-eyed woman who gathered shamrock for us, by the broken round tower close by, and showed me the holy basin, ruined, but never empty, she said, even in the longest drought. Killarney's lakes! "Sweet Innis-fallen!" where, against a background of holly trees 2,000 years old and arbutus and ferns, we gazed down on the lake, while Aunt A. deciphered the Runic characters on the tomb-stones in the deserted abbey. Glengarriff! Bantry! They rise up in a host at the very name of Ireland; and we only drank a drop from the great pitcher of her beauty!

The little fortnight! I could return and return, and so say all three of us.

"I have come back to my Home Rule principles," Aunt A. says. "The cardrivers' charges and the beggars' pertinacity have melted into a pleasant distance, and I am as staunch as ever. And Ireland is not distressful, she is beautiful."

"But I wish I could have kissed the Blarney Stone," Clarinda concludes. It is the sole disappointment she can offer now, so she dwells upon it. I tell her, if Pythagoras is correct, she may one day develop into a bird or a spider, and then she can gain her heart's desire after all.

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## A Fair Hindoo.

By JOHN H. WILLMER.

### CHAPTER XXX.

#### THE CAPTURE OF YAKOOB'S STRONGHOLD.

AS night set in, sounds of revelry issued from the fort. Nor did these sounds cease till about one in the morning.

The soldiers slept. Not so Vincent and the guide. Both were too excited even to lie down and rest.

As soon as a hushed silence fell over the fort, Ali, to the delight of the doctor, declared the moment for a move had come.

Led by the guide, the troops advanced in quite a different direction to the one taken by the three men on the morning before, and after half-an-hour's tortuous travelling, the ascent of the hill on which the fortress stood, began.

Presently, Ali called a halt.

"Sahib," said he, addressing Major Hoyles, "in front of us, here, is a sally-port, which the Doctor Sahib and I will open from within. The walls themselves are not high, but are made so by the precipitous rocks on which they are builded. Now my plan is this: Vincent Sahib and I will, by means of a ladder I have with me, enter the fort. We will open the sally-port for you, but you must not enter. For it will be difficult, the garrison being aroused, to rescue Missy Helen. If in half-an-hour, or say an hour, you hear not of us, then enter; or in case of firing, rush to our assistance."

Major Hoyles thought Ali's a wise plan, indeed; and he said so.

Leaving the major, the guide conducted Vincent to the east side of the fort, and here, placing a bamboo ladder, which he had taken care to bring with him, against the wall, he ascended. After him Vincent followed immediately. Once up, the guide ordered the doctor to lie flat on the ramparts, while he slowly crept to where, on the inside, a sentry leaned on his rifle.

Just now the moon peeped from behind a black cloud, and, a



beam emanating from it, bathed Ali in light, as he stood over the sentry, his rifle clubbed in his hand. In an instant the weapon descended on the head of the sleepy soldier, braining him. The rifle of the man struck on a stone, causing the steel barrel to ring out.

Immediately, from a distance, came the challenge: "Who's there?"

Equal to the occasion, the guide personated the soldier, and answered: "All's well!" then carelessly hummed a tune.

Half-an-hour later, Vincent was following Ali to the sally-port, which the latter opened. Still hugging the wall to keep within its shadow, the men hurried on. Almost at every turn they encountered drunken soldiers, some staggering along, in their filthy condition, unable to find their houses; others stretched on the roads powerless to move. Some, again, broke the still night with cries, curses and groans; while, occasionally, a verse or two of a song was sung out in a husky voice.

Successfully escaping detection, Ali brought Vincent to the house in which Helen was confined. Here a difficulty presented itself. How were they to gain the inclosure? The walls surrounding the building were high, and Ali had forgotten to bring the ladder with him. There was no time to go back for it, as in two hours or so more it would be getting light. Ali stooped down, and Vincent, getting on to his back, managed to hold on to the top of the wall. This was all he wanted. He easily pulled himself up and then assisted Ali. The descent on the other side was easier, the height being scarcely six feet.

"*Shabash!*" exclaimed Ali. "*Allah* has favoured us. *Alhamdo Lellahi!* Praise be to God! That is the room: the one from which the light comes."

Vincent advanced to an open window and looked in. At a second window, directly opposite the one he was looking through, sat Helen, gazing out into the black morning. Her cheeks were pale. He noticed this as she not unfrequently turned her face towards him and looked about the room as if dreading the approach of some one she momentarily expected. The wind played with her hair, which floated about her in wild confusion and at times acted as a sable veil to partially conceal her beautiful face. She looked upwards to the dark sky and watched one by one the lamps of heaven go out. She sighed, for

she knew morning was at hand. And what a morning! She was going to be forced to become a Mohammedan and marry Yakoob. She sobbed aloud in her despair, then she prayed God to send her father or Vincent to save her. "Vincent, dear Vincent," she muttered; and the answer came, "Helen." She trembled in every limb. Was she dreaming? Was she mocked? She had hardly expected a reply. To make sure it was no delusion, she again called, "Vincent!"

Once more the answer:

"Helen!"

No longer in doubt, the girl sprang from her seat and rushed across the room.

"Vincent, you here?"

"Hush, Helen! Yes, 'tis I, Vincent."

"How did you find me?"

"Not now. I'll tell you afterwards. Don't be frightened. Trust yourself to me. There!" as he lifted her out of the room.

Vincent took Helen by the arm and quickly followed the guide to the wall. Ali ascended first. Immediately he crouched down, for a sentry was making his rounds. When the soldier had gone, Vincent assisted Helen up, and then he followed. In the same order the descent was made.

"Who's there?"

From the darkness, to their left, came the challenge.

The soldier, on hearing a noise, had returned.

By way of an answer, Ali raised his rifle and sent a bullet through the man's heart. He dropped dead.

"On! On!" cried Ali, rushing through the darkness, closely followed by Vincent and Miss Hoyles, the latter, fleet as a deer, keeping close by the doctor's side.

The garrison was aroused, and some parties commenced firing. Several men also rushed ahead of the guide, who, pretending he too was in pursuit, shouted:

"Quick! They are escaping! On in front!"

"Who are escaping?" demanded a soldier, mistaking the guide for one of them.

"Traitors! Quick! On!"

The soldiers dashed ahead at a furious rate, and, on turning an angle, were met by a party coming their way. Each

mistaking the other for the enemy, opened fire. Many dropped dead in the first volley.

Meanwhile, Hoyles, hearing firing, remembered what Ali had told him and entered the fort. Now he gave the word, "Charge!" and the men, with a ringing, "Hurrah!" dashed forward to Vincent's help.

"Here they are, major!" exclaimed Shilstone, as he rushed to meet Vincent. "All right, old boy? Got Miss Hoyles?"

"Here she is."

"I am very glad, Miss—er Hoyles; you are all—er ——" stumbled Shilstone in his speech, quite confused.

"No time for making speeches," said Hoyles, laughing. "Our work is cut out for us."

Helen was given in charge of six trusty soldiers, and by them carried to the camp in the woods, while Vincent and the guide joined in the struggle.

The fight at the chief's house was hottest. There, in the hall below, the robbers fought like very demons. Higher, and yet higher, grew a rampart of dead and dying; while the floor became slippery with blood and the atmosphere hot and stifling. Ali fought by Vincent, and many were the efforts made by them to get at Yakooob, who, unconscious of the vicinity of such deadly enemies, cheered on his followers and fought with the courage of a lion.

As Vincent was mowing a lane to the Khan, a native soldier near him had his brains blown out; the *débris* of flesh and bone nearly blinded the doctor. In that moment he would have fallen to the stroke of a Mohammedan who had seized the opportunity of getting rid of so fine a swordsman—for such, in truth, Vincent was—had not a young soldier parried the blow, and with a second stroke killed the man.

British valour and discipline began to tell. Slowly the robbers gave way. Now, Yakooob, calling to him some of his men, sprang up a staircase communicating with a room overhead, and from there fired into the struggling mass below, both British soldiers and robbers falling to every discharge.

Vincent saw that something must be done. He looked around for Major Hoyles and saw that officer engaged with a crowd of the robbers. No help could be had from him, so, calling to Ali, and collecting a few native and English soldiers, he rushed

outside the building with these. The robbers raised a shout of victory.

The sun had now risen and the carnage within the hall was a dreadful spectacle to those outside.

"Ali," said Vincent, "you know the geography of this building. Can't you lead us up there?" pointing to the storey above.

"*Inshallah!* What an owl not to think of it," and he dashed forward, followed by Vincent and the soldiers.

To the rear of the palace they went, where there was an unguarded staircase, and up this the men scrambled to the top storey. For awhile the men stayed to breathe and load their rifles. Then Vincent led them forward and gave the word, "Fire!"

Many and many a robber rolled over to this deadly volley. The courage of the rest was completely demoralized, and they broke and fled.

Yakoob, as if by a miracle, escaped unhurt, and fighting his way outside, he ran towards the battlements, but a few yards off, completely deserted by his men, who fled towards the gate of the fort, hotly pursued by Hoyles and his men.

"He flees! He flees!" cried the guide, pointing with his sword towards the retreating Yakoob. "By the sacred waters of *Zem-Zem*, I swear I'll drink his blood!" and rushing down the stairs, he gave chase to the chief.

They met on the walls, and with bitter oaths engaged in a death struggle.

"Son of a dog!" cried the guide, cutting at Yakoob with his sword, "Take that!"

"Yea, *Allah!* A woman's hand!" jeered the Khan, as he adroitly parried the blow and, in turn, cut at his opponent.

Blade met blade, but with such force did Yakoob deliver his stroke that Ali's sword was wrenched from his hand and sent whirling into the air. Now Yakoob tormented Ali, who was at his mercy. With a clever stroke he cut off the man's right ear. Then he stabbed him all about the body, taking care, however, not to pierce too deep, and to avoid every vital part.

While this "cat and mouse" play was going on, Vincent watched the issue of the fight from below. He knew he was powerless to help Ali. If he made as if rushing towards the combatants, he guessed Yakoob with one stroke would terminate

this now one-sided fight. If he but had a pistol or rifle with him, he could easily have picked off the robber. But, alas! at the moment he possessed neither.

All this time Ali dodged about, trying to wrestle with the Khan, who, however, kept him at a distance by means of his sword.

Having, with the eye of an artist, carved on the naked breast of Ali various shapes and forms, Yakoob lifted his sword to put an end to his amusement, for he knew he must be away. He had seen Vincent, and with his eye measured him. He calculated on an easy victory. His face lit up with a revengeful smile as he flourished his heavy sword above his head; the air whistled as he did so. Now, as he was about to cut at the uncovered head of Ali with all his might, he paused and changed colour.

"Did I not shoot you?" he asked.

"It looks like it," sneered Ali. "Thoo! You pride yourself on being a marksman, and I was but a hundred yards away and you missed me."

"See if I'll miss you now," he shouted angrily, as his sword descended through the air. Ali had waited for this patiently. He nimbly sprang aside to escape the blow; then, before the Khan could recover his guard, sprang in and grappled with him.

The sword to Yakoob was now useless. So, casting it aside, he put forth all his strength to prevent himself being hurled over the battlements, for the fortifications, on this side, were built on a natural wall of rock, rising sheer up from a depth of 2,543 feet.

Backwards and forwards the men swayed as each tried to hurl the other over. With arms coiled around one another's body, they stumbled from point to point.

Vincent looked on speechless from below.

Ali, of the two, was the stronger, and were it not that he had lost a quantity of blood, the struggle would, ere this, have terminated in his favour. As it was, he gradually edged the Khan to the very brink of the precipice. Here, for awhile, both remained locked in each other's arms; and, to Vincent, they appeared as if figures cut in stone, so motionless were they. Yet, at this moment, each was measuring to the utmost his strength with that of his opponent. This could be seen from the swelling muscles of their thighs and arms and from the tightening of every vein in their necks and faces.

Soon Yakoob's body bent slowly backwards. Yet his feet kept their place. Lower and yet lower his huge frame sunk, till his face was turned upwards. Now, like a mighty tree uprooted by angry winds, which in vain strove to break it asunder, did this man's feet give its hold, and striking Ali, broke his balance, and together the men fell headlong downward into the deep ravine.

Vincent rushed up, and, leaning over, saw both, still locked in each other's arms, bounding from rock to rock. Presently they separated, and one was thrown here, the other there, and were lost in the jungle below.

### CHAPTER XXXI.

THE REV. MR. WHITE OPENS THE SEALED PACKET PLACED  
IN HIS HANDS BY CHARLES EDWARDS.

DURING the struggle which took place in Yakoob's palace, a native soldier—it was too dark to see what he was like—fought constantly at Vincent's side. Several times he saved the doctor's life, and, in fact, fell, pierced by a sword, receiving the thrust which had been meant for Vincent. There was no time to see who it was, or whether he was killed or wounded; but now that the fight was over, Vincent remembered the brave soldier and he hurried back to search for him. It would not be difficult, he knew, to distinguish him from the others, because of a long grey overcoat he wore.

As soon as he entered the hall, where lay the dead in heaps, testifying to the stubborn nature of the fight, Vincent at once saw the man he came in search of. He was lying among a heap of slain, with his cap drawn over his face. Vincent stooped to examine him. He leaped to his feet with a cry; then was on his knees again, whispering, "Devaki! Devaki!"

Yes; it was Devaki who had fought by the side of Vincent. She had been left at the camp in the woods, but had escaped, and putting on a soldier's coat had found her way into the fort and to Vincent's side.

In a little while, Devaki opened her eyes, but seeing who it was that was kneeling, with moist eyes, by her, she closed hers again, ashamed to look the doctor in the face.

"Devaki!" cried Vincent.

"Sahib," said the girl in a feeble voice, "do not speak to me.



You ought to be ashamed of me for—for—wearing men's clothes."

"Ashamed! Have you not—did you not save my life? Never has any woman shown for man such a love as yours, Devaki."

"Believe it not, sahib. Helen loves you."

"Peace. *You are mine.*"

"I am dying. Nay, do not say no, because I feel it and am glad. Now shall I escape Ali——"

"He is dead."

"*Dead!*" cried the girl, attempting to sit up.

"Yes," answered Vincent, and he told her how Ali and Yakoob fell into the ravine.

The girl closed her eyes. But she told not Vincent of the thoughts that tormented her then. Here was she free, and she could be, without breaking her word, Vincent's wife; but would she live?

She allowed Vincent to examine her wound in silence; but when he had finished, she asked:

"Will I live, sahib?"

"Devaki," cried Vincent, after a pause, "I cannot lie to you. You have not many hours to live."

"God's will be done," she murmured. Then added, "Carry me from here, sahib. This room has a sickly look about it."

The soldiers were already out with stretchers, to carry away the wounded, and Vincent had Devaki carried to an empty house close by, while he went around binding up the wounds of the injured soldiers. This took him several hours to do; and when he returned to Devaki, he found Shilstone and Hoyles there, and to them he told of Devaki's heroism and of the death of Ali and Yakoob.

The girl's bravery and love touched the two men to the heart, and kneeling down, Hoyles sobbed aloud—a thing he had not done since he was a child.

"Weep not, sahib," said Devaki. "You cry as if I were a child of yours, and not——"

"Devaki," said Vincent, forgetting his promise to Hoyles, "you are his daughter."

"Hush," cried the major, springing to his feet. But Devaki had heard Vincent, and she asked:

"Sahib, is his daughter? Tell me quick, sahib."

Hoyles hesitated.

"Tell her all," said Vincent. "She has not many more hours to live."

Hoyles lifted his hands from his face and said :

"You are right ; I must—it is my duty to tell her now. Wait till Helen comes. I have sent for her."

The reader is perhaps not aware, their names not being mentioned before, that the Rev. Mr. White and Mr. Jones accompanied the troops—the former to administer to the souls of the soldiers ; the latter to procure "copy" for his paper. These two gentlemen now accompanied Helen into the fort and entered the sick chamber. Devaki's eyes opened wide with pleasure on seeing the clergyman. During the march they had had long talks together on religion, and now Devaki wished to be baptized. This ceremony over, Hoyles commanded the attention of those present to a story he had to tell them. The first part of it, about Hoyles' friend marrying a Hindoo lady, has been already told in Chapter III. of this novel, and so the reader's time need not be wasted by giving it again here. The rest of the story is new, and shall be given in the major's own words, as recorded by Vincent in his diary.

"If you will remember," continued Hoyles, "I said the man who lost his wife in so remarkable a way was a friend of mine ; let me correct myself—he was my son. Now listen to the base, ignoble part I played : I worked so that my wife appeared to be the wretch and not I. True, she forged the letters, but I it was that compelled her. After my son's wife had been stolen from him, I and his mother returned to England, for my regiment was stationed there. We took back with us our granddaughter, my son's child by a former marriage. She was only two years old then, and her mother had died in giving her birth.

"As soon as we reached England, I sent my granddaughter to America, to some of our relations there. I had hardly done this when my son, having sold out, arrived. My wife pleaded for him ; and my son, on his knees, begged of me to tell him where his wife and child were. But such was my foolish pride in those days that I upbraided him for—as I argued—disgracing our family, and said his marriage was no marriage. He leaped to his feet at this, his face all aglow with indignation. 'She is my lawful wife,' he cried, 'just as much as my mother is yours.'

"'Wife or no wife,' I returned, 'she will never be owned by me.'

"'I don't want you to,' he replied. 'Where is she? That is what I want from you.'

"'You have come to the wrong person,' said I, lying. 'Ask your mother.'

"My son turned to his mother, but he saw the look of surprise in her face, and he jerked around to me again, and hissed, 'Liar!' My whole body shook with anger, and I pointed to the door.

"'If he goes,' threatened my wife, 'I go with him.'

"I cursed them both and bid them never darken my door again. I soon discovered that my son was making preparations to go out to America to get his daughter, and then return to India. Now mine was, in those days, a revengeful nature. I directed that my granddaughter should be returned to me. This precaution was needless, for the vessel that brought her also arrived with the news that my wife and son had perished at sea. I learnt soon afterwards, however, that this was not the case, and both were safe in America.

"Soon after receiving this news, I set sail for the Cape, taking my granddaughter with me. While out here my regiment was sent to India and I received orders to join it, which I did, after sending my granddaughter back to a good school there. I was now stricken with remorse, and I tried to obtain forgiveness by finding my son's wife and his daughter. Of my wife and son I had lost all trace till, twelve years ago, I learnt from a friend of mine that my son was in India, and my wife intended joining him soon, and had booked her passage in the 'Silver Queen.' That boat, after leaving England, was never heard of more. Of my son I have still found no trace, and my belief is, he has returned to England."

A long silence followed. Then Mr. White made a few remarks, and told the major to "cheer up," and that God would surely pardon his sins after the way he had striven to repent and mend matters. Then Vincent said :

"Major, there is one point yet not clear to me: the likeness between Helen and Devaki."

"They are sisters. Helen is my granddaughter. I took her over to the Cape with me; stole her, in fact, from her father. I dreaded this question being asked, for I know Helen will now despise me."

"Never!" cried Helen, throwing herself into the old man's arms. "You have been good and kind to me. And if you treated my father badly, you have spent the better portion of your life atoning for it. What were my mother and father like?" asked Helen, changing the subject.

"These are their photos—though very small ones," said Major Hoyles, opening a locket suspended from his chain. Mr. White, who was looking over Hoyles' shoulder at the photos, exclaimed:

"What! That's Charles Edwards."

"That's my son's likeness," said the major stiffly.

"Let me see it," asked Vincent. "Yes," he cried; "the very image of Charles Edwards and—as I once before remarked to you, Mr. White—of Devaki's father."

"Devaki's father? Where did you see this photo?" asked Hoyles.

"At Jaggoonath's. It was stolen with his money. By-the-bye, have you found the papers Jugg. referred to when he was dying?"

"No," replied Hoyles. "They have been burnt, I am told. But this Edwards—who is he?"

"A young stranger who died in India."

"Did he leave no papers—nothing?"

"I have them here," said Mr. White, and taking out a sealed packet from his pocket-book, he showed them what was written on the envelope, to explain his reason for not opening the packet before.

As he tore away the cover, three photos dropped to the floor. Two were like the miniature photographs exhibited by Hoyles; the other was a likeness of Devaki's mother. Hoyles almost fainted at sight of these. Some water was brought him to drink, and he was made to lie on a bench in the room.

"I am better," he whispered. "Read! Read!—Great God!—My son died at Mariepoor and I knew it not. This is indeed punishment."

The Rev. Mr. White did as he was bid. The following is a summary of the contents of the packet:

After being driven from his home, Charles Hoyles\* and his mother set sail for America; not in the boat that went down, but in another. They had booked their passages in the former

\* Charles Edwards.

but had fortunately missed the vessel, and did not leave England till the following week. Now, neither knew whereabouts their relations were, and America being a big place, they knocked about for months, but at last found the correct address. But, to their disappointment, they found that Helen had been sent back. Once more to England they returned, to discover that Hoyles had sailed for Africa.

Charles thought it the better plan to leave his father alone for awhile and to go out to India, before more time was lost, and look out his wife and daughter. He accordingly (leaving his mother in England) sailed for India. Before doing so, however, the better to throw his father off his guard, he changed his and his mother's name to Edwards. He was shipwrecked off the coast of Spain, but this was not the only interruption to his voyage to India, for on getting to France he was unjustly accused of being connected with a gang of robbers, and cast into prison. For years he lingered there, till at length, owing to the intervention of a French officer whom he knew in India, he was liberated. That same officer furnished him with the means of getting a passage out to India. The ship touched at the Cape. Charles made inquiries about his father, and learnt that he was in India. On landing in Bombay, he heard that his father was in Mhow, and there he went to plead with him once more, hoping that time had softened his heart.

Here Charles Hoyles' diary came to a close, but Mr. White completed it by saying :

"Mr. Hoyles, or Charles Edwards as he called himself, did actually come to Mariepoor, but, alas! cholera attacked him and he died soon. Why it was he did not make inquiries of either the doctor or me about his father, Mr. Hoyles, I cannot say; but now, calling to mind the last moments of the deceased, he thought it, I imagine, better to go to his rest with the hope that his father had repented him of what he had done, because I remember hearing him say: 'Shall I send for him? I am sure he will tell me what I want to know now.' Then he paused a second to think, and said—still speaking to himself—'No, I'll die happier hoping he has repented.'

"A few seconds later his spirit fled.

"Now," continued Mr. White, "there is something I wish to tell you. Perhaps you will call it instinct, but I, the hand of

God: Miss Hoyles regularly placed flowers on the grave of her father, little knowing then that in such relationship he stood to her."

"It is strange," said Helen. "I little knew, indeed, who lay there."

"And I have never placed a flower on my father's grave," said Devaki. "Helen—sister—I cannot do it now. But you—will you before you sail for England, for I hear you are going home immediately, will you place a little wreath in my name?"

A kiss and a choking sob was the answer.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### DEATH OF DEVAKI.

BOTH Vincent and Major Hoyles had much to do that day. The former had to attend to the wounded; the latter to the prisoners. The bodies of Yakooob and Ali, fearfully mutilated, were recovered from the ravine and buried, with the other Mohammedan soldiers and robbers killed, in a common grave outside the fort. At some distance from the fort, under a large tree, the European soldiers who were killed in the storming of the robber stronghold were buried side by side, in separate graves, after the funeral service had been read over them by their chaplain.

Now there were many women in the fort, and Hoyles was puzzled how to dispose of them. They were all collected in the Khan's harem. Hoyles shifted this unpleasant task on to the shoulders of Vincent. To the doctor's surprise, he found the women not a bit afraid or shy, nor were they averse to showing their faces.

"What are we to do with you all?" asked Vincent. "Some of you have lost your husbands." (With the ends of their *saris*, the women wiped away imaginary tears.) "Would you like to go back to your relations?"

"I would like you to marry me," said a young and pretty creature, one of Yakooob's wives.

"I cannot do that," said Vincent, smiling. "But I have an idea. Would you like to marry some of our Mohammedan soldiers?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" came the ready cries.



"Come on out, then," said Vincent, and he led them into the open. Shilstone collected all the marriageable young Moham-medan soldiers and drew them up in a line facing the women. On the word of command, "Charge!" they were to rush forward and seize whoever they liked. Never with such promptitude, or such lightness of spirit, with such shouts and laughter, was a charge made before by these men. And there was such dodging on the part of the pretty girls to escape ugly soldiers and be captured by men who were good-looking or passable. In five minutes time every woman there had a supporter, and before evening all were made man and wife by their priest.

As soon as the "charge" was over, Shilstone linked his arm within that of Vincent and said:

"Tell me, old fellow—is there no hope for Devaki?"

"None."

"I am so sorry for you."

"What's making you look so gloomy?"

"Ah, well, I've not caught my fortune."

"What do you mean?"

"Yakoob went and got killed by Ali, instead of by me—and the reward of course goes to no one—or to every one. My marriage day is very far off now."

"But you'll get a share of the loot."

"I did not think of that. How much has been collected?"

"I don't know. Look here, Shilstone; you must excuse me. I must go and see what Devaki is doing."

"By all means, go. Ta-ta!"

Hoyles and Vincent were in and out of the room in which Devaki lay the whole of that day, looking in to see how she was, and then attending to other business. Devaki slept for the greater part of the day, while Helen and Mr. White watched and prayed by her bed. Towards evening she awoke and called her friends around her, and bid each in turn good-bye. Jones' eyes were moist as he gallantly stooped and kissed the girl's hand.

Devaki noticed his wet eyes, and she said:

"Sahib, why do you cry?"

"Ask me not to speak," implored Jones, and he rushed away to hide his tears.

"Poor man!" exclaimed Devaki. "He has the soft heart of

a woman. And now, sahibs," she continued, "I wish to be alone with Vincent Sahib and my sister."

When all had left the room except the doctor and Helen, Devaki took the hand of the one and the hand of the other and joined them.

"Promise me," she said to Helen, "that you will marry Vincent Sahib."

"I cannot. If you live—as I hope you will, Vincent will——"

"I'll not live. Ask the sahib, here, and he'll tell you, as he has already told me, that I have not many more hours to live. So, promise me."

"I promise."

"And you, sahib, will you not promise?"

"Devaki, do not ask me such a question. Remember, I am engaged to you."

"I know. I know also that your love for me is the love of a brother for a sister. But you are noble and generous, and would marry Devaki because of your promise. Think not to hurt me by promising. I shall die happily instead. Promise me, sahib."

"I promise."

"Now I'm happy. Before I became a Christian—nay, I was a Christian before to-day, for I was baptized when a baby—I mean, before I knew what became of our souls when we died, I was unhappy. But now I'm full of gladness, for I hope to meet you all again."

After a few minutes, she asked :

"Where will I be buried?"

Neither Vincent nor Helen could command their voices to answer her, and she said :

"Tell my grandfather to bury me outside the fort. This place is so full of wickedness."

Vincent simply bowed his head.

"And now I have yet one thing more to do: make my will. Call in the sahibs again."

Major Hoyles, Shilstone and Jones re-entered the room. Jones wrote the will to Devaki's dictation, and then Vincent and Shilstone placed their signatures to it. Devaki left all her lands and houses to Helen. This done, Devaki said :

"I'm tired, I wish to sleep."

All, save Helen, retired from the room. Vincent went away

for a little while to attend to some of the wounded men, and then returned and watched by Devaki's bed. Hoyles, too, came in later on. Towards midnight, Devaki awoke, but kept awake for a short while only, and then slept without a break till about 4.30 a.m. Vincent examined her, and found she had but an hour or two to live now. Devaki saw the colour fade from his face and she guessed the cause.

"I have not many hours to live—have I?" she inquired, without a quiver in her voice.

"Two or three hours—at the most, four," answered Vincent.

"Has Mr. White come?"

"I am here," replied the clergyman, as he stepped into the room. He soon changed his black coat for his surplice, and celebrated the Holy Eucharist. All in the room, beginning with Devaki, received. The scene was a most solemn one.

As soon as the celebration was over, Mr. White went away to administer the Sacrament to some of the wounded soldiers who, too, were dying.

"Is it dark yet?" inquired Devaki. "Has the sun not risen?"

Vincent threw open the windows.

"I see a faint light behind those hills," remarked the doctor.

"I wonder if I shall see the sun rise," said Devaki.

There was no answer to her question.

"Do you think, Helen, I'll be able to see you and watch over you from where I am going?"

"That is my firm belief."

"I am so glad. It makes one less timid, now, to face the darkness. Grandfather, come close to me; I cannot see you standing there. I am going soon. May I tell my mother that you have forgiven her?"

"Eh? What do you say?"

"I shall see my mother, shall I not?"

Vincent whispered something to Hoyles.

"Yes;" he said to Devaki, "tell your mother that I am sorry for what I did to her."

"I'll not forget it." Then, after a pause:

"And may I tell our father, Helen, that you regularly placed flowers on his grave?"

Helen could not answer her, but burying her face in Devaki's bosom, wept.

"The sun is just rising," said Vincent, knowing of nothing better to say.

"Is it?" asked Devaki. "It looks to me as if it were getting darker. Lift me, Vincent, that I may peep out and see the day-break—the last—the very last on earth."

Vincent, placing his arm around her, supported her while she gazed out of the window and watched the golden orb slowly creep up the back of a distant hill and shoot out its rays over the country.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Devaki. "I don't remember ever seeing a daybreak so beautiful before. Here comes Mr. White. I was looking out on the sun, sir."

"You will soon, I hope, be gazing on the Sun of Righteousness, my child."

Devaki now grew heavy on Vincent's arm, and he gradually let her fall back on to her pillow again. Then he kissed her. She circled her arms about his neck and kissed him again and again, and for the first time since receiving the wound, cried—not from the pain of it, but with the parting from him whom she loved, him for whom she had received her death wound. "Good-bye," she whispered. "You, sahib, will never know how much Devaki loved you." Then, turning around to the others, she said, "Good-bye, grandfather! Good-bye, my sister! Good-bye, all! I'm going to leave you all now."

"May your soul be soon received into everlasting happiness," prayed Mr. White.

"Amen!" answered Jones and Shilstone. The others, however, had not sufficient mastery over their voices to respond.

Devaki's eyes became now fixed on Vincent. He took her hand in his, and she gazed lovingly into his eyes. Her own soon became glassy, and she breathed in short gasps. Her whole body then shook convulsively, and then all was over: her spirit had fled to its Creator. Not a sob broke the stillness that followed.

In accordance with Devaki's wish, her body was buried outside the fort, under a large shady tree.

#### CONCLUSION.

PERHAPS the reader has forgotten the promise made him in the very first chapter of this story. If he has, I must ask him to

again read the opening chapter, and he will soon come across the passage about Old "Jack" Company sending troops to Mariepoor to die; and about them continuing to send till—and I promised to tell him *what* in good time.

The reason—as, no doubt, the reader has already guessed for himself—is this: The object in keeping troops at Mariepoor, as already stated in chapter one, was to free the place of robbers—*i.e.*, of Yakoob and his men, for they were the only ones about there. This had now been accomplished, and "Jack" Company ordered the withdrawal of the troops.

A month after the destruction of Yakoob and his gang came the order to quit. There were none so delighted with the news as Hoyles and Vincent—especially the latter, for he had received advices from home that Dr. Snell was dangerously ill and would, in all probability, be unable to return to India for some considerable time. Hoyles sent in his papers, and Vincent was told that he was at liberty to return to England as the troops—drafts from different regiments—had orders to rejoin their respective corps, which already had doctors attached to them.

Some few days after Hoyles had sent in his resignation came the joyful news to Macbay that he was promoted to the rank of major in his regiment, which had lost its officer; and to Shilstone, that he was promoted to the rank of captain for his gallant conduct during the recent operations. His bravery was brought prominently into notice by the stirring article in the *Bombay Gup*, from the pen of Jones, who had now completely sobered down and was a prime favourite with the Mariepoor folk.

Things, then, were looking bright for our friends. Greengrass was the only one who had some cause to grumble. True enough his salary had been increased by a hundred rupees; but he had not got his orders to quit. In fact, he did not leave Mariepoor for nearly a year afterwards.

Helen did not forget the promise she made Devaki, and before leaving Mariepoor for good, she placed two wreaths on their father's grave.

Early one morning, the troops marched out of Mariepoor, with colours flying and band playing. I will not weary the reader by a description of the route; it will be sufficient if I say that all reached Bombay in safety. As luck would have it, a "trooper"

was ready to sail for England, and in her Major and Miss Hoyles and Vincent took passage.

On arriving in England, Vincent went immediately to his people, in Manchester, and Hoyles and his granddaughter settled in London. Helen and Vincent communicated with one another regularly, but as yet Vincent had not asked the girl to be his wife, nor did he till nearly a year after their arrival in England.

It was early in December, and Vincent had paid his usual fortnightly visit. He and Helen were sitting alone in the sitting-room, for the major had gone out.

"The last Indian mail brought me a letter from Shilstone," said Vincent.

"Oh! How is he? Married?"

"Yes. I'll read you what he says," and Vincent took a letter out of his pocket. "'I am glad to tell you, old chappie, I am married at last. Macbay stood best man for me. My wife sends her best *salaams* to you, and hopes to hear soon that you also are a happy man. I hear that Greengrass, to whom the major had intrusted the business, has sold Miss Hoyles' houses, left her by Devaki, at good prices.'"

After reading this extract from the Indian letter, Vincent folded and placed it in his pocket. Then he said, taking Helen's hand in his:

"Helen, may I write and say that I *am* a happy man? That you have consented to become my wife?"

And the answer was:

"Yes."

Hoyles was delighted when the news was broken to him, and so also were Vincent's people. They had taken a great fancy to Helen since the very first day they had seen her.

Within three months after this, Vincent and Helen were made man and wife. They went for a prolonged honeymoon trip to Switzerland, and on their return settled in Manchester, where already Vincent had extensive practice. The old major soon joined them there, and made his home with them; and he was never more happy than when telling his great-grandchildren—he had two of them in due course of time—about their heroic aunt, Devaki, and how she saved their father's life by giving hers for his.

THE END.